COMMONWEAL

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CHRISTMAS BOOKS / CRITICS' CHOICES

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on the wealth gap

JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK
on Yves Congar

Speaking infallibly about women
THE EDITORS

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To the Editors

An author displeased

I suppose a Milledgeville girl ought to be pleased with most Any notice in *Commonweal* 31 years after the Event but I am not Over-Gratified to read [November 3] that Mr T P Schilling finds my letters the "most satisfying" of my "works." How'd he like somebody studying over the Remains of 18 years of his labor on the evidence of a bin-full of his used Kleenex Tisuus (sp.?)? He does seem a nice earnest fellow though. Things are even funnier here in Purgatory where I've recently been named Senior Resident Emerita. (The Parent is crazy about that title.)

Appreciatively, sort of,

(MISS) FLANNERY O'CONNOR
Address indecipherable

Consider our source

While "writer and former lawyer" James Duffy's review [October 6] of Newt Gingrich's book was no particular surprise—churlish, juvenile, crudely phrased—the headline appended by the editors intrigued me: "The man who stole Congress."

I should imagine that the word "stole" was chosen with care. Is *Commonweal* suggesting that the results of the 1994 congressional elections—upsetting a half-century of Democratic control of the House of Representatives—were somehow illegitimate, or obtained by unlawful means? I can appreciate the rage of *Commonweal* and its readers at the spectacle of Speaker Gingrich, but has anger really reduced you to this?

PHILIP TERZIAN
Oakton, Va.

From the editors: Our correspondent is perhaps not familiar with the lighthearted fable by Dr. Seuss that inspired the headline: *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas*. It was hard to resist.

Carlin is logical

David R. Carlin, Jr.'s column, "On the Way to the Altar" [October 20] is the most logical and common-sense formulation I have ever read on the subject of a celibate vs. married priesthood.

Carlin's question, "[H]ow do we know there is a shortage of priests?" suggests that we may be seeking a quick-fix, Band-Aid solution to an actual problem without really considering the consequences. If we choose to ignore the tradition (heritage) of the priesthood in the Catholic church, we will indeed diminish the priesthood, not only desacralizing it but creating a totally other ministry, like the permanent diaconate, with its glut of members in the United States but with blurred meaning and purpose.

Other solutions may actually work without requiring so great a change in the sacrament of orders. A simple one would be to reduce the number of Masses where the number of those participating is significantly smaller than the church's capacity. My parish has five week-end Masses but could function very well with three.

I hope that the silence of the pro-celibacy side does not mean that they cannot hear the "signs of the times."

BENEDICT F. SHAFER
Chicago, Ill.

Correction ■ The prices of two books reviewed in our November 17 issue should have read as follows: *The Psalter*, Liturgical Training Publications, $25; paper, $16. And *Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer*, Liturgical Training Publications, $25; paper, $16.

Death penalty revisited

Every time I try to clear off my desk I'm left with one intractable item, the June 16 issue of *Commonweal*. So, finally, I am doing what I must do, something I've never done before, writing to the editors!

About "The Thirst for Revenge," by Sidney Callahan. To be perfectly clear, let me mention, first, that I have come to expect that your analysis of social issues will be not only penetrating and balanced but fairly representative of diverse opinions; second, that in my view Callahan is usually a fine commentator; third, that I believe capital punishment is almost always morally wrong, and certainly always so in the United States in our time. Nevertheless, both the title and content of this article disturb me greatly.

Though in places Callahan seems fleetingly to glimpse the valid moral depth of arguments favoring capital punishment, her article emphasizes extremist caricatures of that position. For example, while she purports to have listened "hard" to those who believe the death penalty justified, she denigrates one of their points by inserting an unnecessary and false (because unqualified) aside: "The act of execution, *however cruel*, gives symbolic witness both to the importance of the victim's life...and to the community's absolute rejection of crime" [italics added]. I know several who support the death penalty in certain situations, and none who support it "however cruel."

Of course one can argue, and I do, that all execution, however swift and painless and sanitized, is disrespectful of the dignity of the person—but that's another point. My complaint is that Callahan didn't go after the arguments of her opponents. Does/can the death penalty properly give symbolic witness to the importance of the victim's life and the community's absolute rejection of crime? Is it the best way to do this? Callahan slammed them with an aside. Unfair! The piece never does take on the serious arguments of those who defend capital punishment out of their understanding of how justice is to be served—perhaps because Callahan turns retribution into revenge throughout

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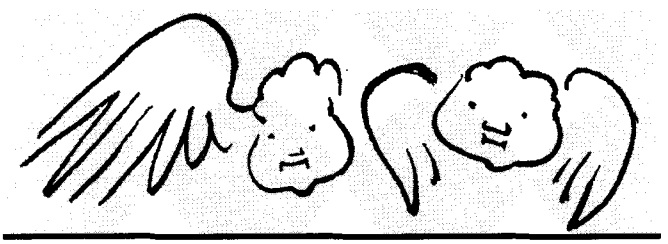

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Critics' choices for Christmas
Traveling widely, reading closely (even eccentrically), and judging perspicaciously, our panel of Christmas critics has put together a list of titles that includes everything from an obedient Lassie to God's brilliantly wayward "biographer." And then there's the poetry and the theology. Please share the good words.

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the article. There is an important distinction that must be preserved.

The title aims at the low point of the article. Callahan wants to take on the symbolic meaning of the death-penalty, a task in great need of her expertise. But what happens? We get phrases such as "the thirst for the death penalty," suggesting that supporters are salivating for more. Some death-penalty supporters pray and weep for those executed. To argue that there is a position in support of capital punishment is not to thirst for more.

Why take on those who say "these criminals are vile animals," or who believe that any persons are "inhuman scum who don't deserve to live"? I can't imagine anyone who thinks like this even stumbling across an issue of *Commonweal*! Immanuel Kant and, in your own pages, Paul Baumann have presented morally cogent arguments in support of capital punishment. Who can imagine either of them thirsting for revenge or speaking of anyone as a vile animal?

Our culture suffers from the divisive and dishonest rhetoric that surrounds many of the most important debates of our time; in my judgment, *Commonweal* contributed to this problem with this article and its title.

SHANNON McINTYRE SKOUSGAARD
Reston, Va.

The author replies:

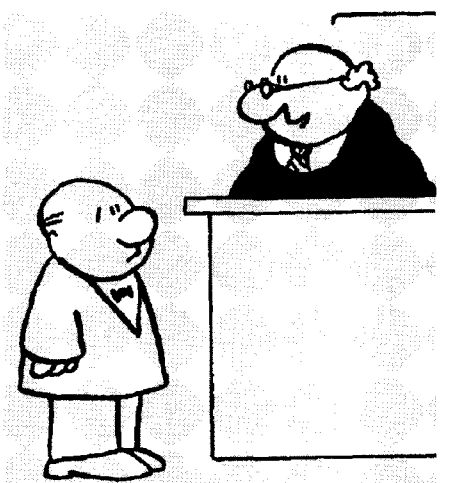
Let it be known that I vigorously protested the title given to my column by the editors, because I thought the phrase, "The Thirst for Revenge," gave a completely false impression of my main message. Like Ms. Skousgaard, I was trying to make the point that we should not dismiss our opponents but should try to understand their views of the death penalty, not as a thirst for revenge but as a symbolic moral witness to "true justice," as well as an act of ritualized reparation and corporate purification.

I mentioned people who think "criminals are vile animals," not because they read *Commonweal*, but because I regularly meet great numbers of these folks voicing these opinions in my classes. They have to be taken seriously because they vote—for capital punishment.

Now for the problem of the phrase "however cruel" set off by commas. I guess I thought that commas would provide ambiguity and let it be clear that it is *my* view that the death penalty is cruel, not that proponents are for the death penalty however cruel.

Well, obviously I did not succeed in my efforts in this column. Paul Baumann and Immanuel Kant win again.

SIDNEY CALLAHAN



"Since the death penalty is illegal in this state, I sentence you to be grievously wounded."

Harmful editorial

I was dismayed by your editorial, "Do No Harm," in the issue of October 6. I had grown to expect more from *Commonweal* (and from its readers: There were no protests in the following issue). To repeat the Washington propaganda, as do the rest of the media, is beneath *Commonweal*.

The editorial noted that Social Security takes 34 percent of the budget, but failed to point out that this trust—which should not be part of the budget—had a surplus in each of the past three years of between $46.2 billion and $53.2 billion, thereby *reducing* the annual deficit. If Social Security taxes were fair, that is, if corporate chiefs were to pay 7.6 percent of total salary, as do those making under $61,200, it has been estimated the revenue generated could cut the deficit in half. These were the numbers cited by Arnold J. Olenick, a financial and management consultant, in a letter to the *New York Times* published February 1 of this year.

Without indicating a source, the editorial says that 19 percent of the budget goes to the military. Would that this were true! The figure given by the Center for Defense Information is 52 percent.

I do believe your editorial, despite its title, does much harm.

BARBARA LANGAN
Montclair, New Jersey

The editors reply:

The editorial did not say that Social Security absorbs 34 percent of the budget, but rather that Medicare and Social Security *combined* do so. The percentanges we quoted were based on Office of Management and Budget spendng figures for Fiscal Year 1995. In light of them, we wonder how the Center for Defense Information arrived at its calculations.

It is true that at the present time Social Security taxes produce a large surplus over the amounts needed to pay for current Social Security benefits. This will not always be the case, however, and that is a legitimate concern for future recipients, since the surplus is not being held in trust but is being spent to meet today's budget requirements. In fact, then, whether or not the surplus should be part of the budget, it is.

Finally, the rate of Social Security taxes for various income groups would make a good editorial topic. It is not one we discussed in our editorial on the threat to Medicare.

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Responsum dubium

When the Vatican archives for 1995 are opened, we hope that they will show that the pope and his advisers went through as much anguish in deciding to issue the latest statement ruling out the possibility of ordaining women as many conscientious Catholics will undergo in encountering it (*see* box, page 6).

We hope that the archives will show that Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger were fully sensitive to the crises of faith they were about to provoke; to the wounds on the body of Christ that would result; to the individuals who would seek spiritual homes elsewhere; to the young people who would shrug off the whole episode as another sign of the church's irrelevance; to public figures who would persist in a quiet Catholicism but feel unable, with integrity, to identify themselves visibly with a church so much at odds with their own convictions; to those who would continue to carry out church ministries but with a gnawing reservation and a germ of cynicism planted in their hearts.

We hope that the archives will show that pope and cardinal recognized the serious obstacle their decision would raise to those struggling to maintain the Catholic identity of institutions like universities and hospitals where many professionals already believe that automatic acquiescence in any exercise of church authority is incompatible with personal dignity and the open pursuit of truth.

We hope that pope and cardinal felt obliged to act fully cognizant of the body blow that they would deliver to the authority of the papacy itself and maybe even to the concept of infallibility. They understood, we hope, that the affection and inspiration so apparent during John Paul's recent visit to the United State already coexisted with a distressing readiness to treat his teaching office as purely advisory.

Comments on the congregation's statement by several prominent American prelates show that they were all too aware of these destructive consequences and would like to forestall them. Were any of them consulted ahead of time by Rome?

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's statement cites Jesus' injunction to Peter to confirm his brethren in the faith, a classic text in Luke for defining the papal office. We hope that the authors also had in mind the passage in Luke where Jesus warns against laying burdens on people that are hard to bear.

It will be a heavy burden. It will require prayer and reflection. Definitive assent to this statement, as to *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* itself, will be a test of faith for many—and on more than one count. That women are definitively excluded from ordination will seem the most troubling claim. But the form of exercising papal authority manifest in this statement may prove even more serious and destabilizing for the church itself.

On the ordination question, Archbishop Anthony Pilla, newly elected president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, insists that different roles in the church do not make women and men unequal. A commentary from the Vatican advances the same argument: Catholics should hold firmly with one hand

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CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

Reply to the *dubium* concerning the teaching contained in the apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*.

Dubium: Whether the teaching that the church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women, which is presented in the apostolic letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis* to be held definitively, is to be understood as belonging to the deposit of the faith.

Responsum: In the affirmative.

This teaching requires definitive assent, since, founded on the written word of God, and from the beginning constantly preserved and applied in the tradition of the church, it has been set forth infallibly by the ordinary and universal magisterium (cf. Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium* 25, 2). Thus, in the present circumstances, the Roman pontiff, exercising his proper office of confirming the brethren (cf. Lk. 22:32), has handed on this same teaching by a formal declaration, explicitly stating what is to be held always, everywhere, and by all, as belonging to the deposit of the faith.

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the audience granted to the undersigned cardinal prefect, approved this reply, adopted in the ordinary session of this congregation, and ordered it to be published.

Rome, from the offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on the feast of the Apostles SS. Simon and Jude, October 28, 1995.

+ Joseph Card. Ratzinger
Prefect

the church's teaching that men and women are fundamentally equal and no less firmly with the other hand the church's teaching that Jesus intended the priesthood to be an exclusively male office. Holding both, the faithful should forge ahead in search of a deeper understanding of both the priesthood and of women's role in the church.

If this plea is to result in anything more than a purely mental exercise in squaring the circle, then pope and bishops must display a willingness to make real changes—to reconfigure church governance, for example, so that ordination is not a condition for holding real offices with real authority. Women should be named full members of the College of Cardinals, prefects of congregations, members of diocesan curias, and so on. Different gender roles cannot provide a cloak for restricting the exercise of authority in the church exclusively to men. Even these reforms will not relieve the consciences—or the pain—of those conscientiously convinced that women are also called to priestly office. It will at most give them and all of us in the church an opportunity to reexamine our premises under new circumstances and in the light of evidence that the church's highest authorities are determined to be as faithful to both of these teachings (gender equality and gender exclusivity) as they require the rest of us to be, no matter the consequences for the *status quo*.

There is a second troubling question. Precisely what form of authority is being exercised here? At the time of *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, we observed, "John Paul is quite certain, although not infallibly certain, of the inherently masculine nature of the Catholic priesthood" (*Commonweal*, June 17, 1994). Has that changed? Not really; it has only become foggier. The congregation's statement asserts that the teaching is founded on the "written word of God" and says that the doctrine has been taught universally by the bishops in accord with Vatican II's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen gentium* 25. But that claim seems open to question. How can the "brethren" of Luke 22:32 (the bishops) be confirmed by the pope in this teaching if in fact they have not been consulted? And how can they be consulted if they have not been permitted to discuss the matter? And how can they discuss the matter if they cannot freely inquire into the sense of the faithful?

Even those who accept that Jesus did not ordain women (or that he ordained men), and who accept that the tradition has not authorized the ordination of women, are left with this question: In an age when the talents and genius of women find ever-richer expression in the life of society, why can these talents and that genius never be expressed as priest or bishop in the Catholic church? This is a question about the future. It is a question that the bishops, whose own teaching role has been passed over in this and other instances, ought to have been asked. What indeed is their teaching role in this or any other matter concerning the ordinary and universal magisterium? Rather than close one question, as the pope undoubtedly wished, his congregation's statement has opened a host of others.

ETCETERA

A CHOICE TO FORGIVE ■ *Aim* is the newsletter of the Alliance for International Monasticism, which exists to foster links among Benedictine and Cistercian communities worldwide. This brief item (slightly edited here) appeared in a recent issue (Vol. 4, No.2). The writer is the Reverend Joseph G. Healey, M.M., of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania:

"In one section of Kigali, Rwanda, the genocidal war between Hutu and Tutsi broke out with a bloody vengeance. Neighbors attacked neighbors. In one area a Hutu man murdered his Tutsi neighbor. Later, after the Rwanda Patriotic Front won the war and took over the government, local investigations of the atrocities started. The wife of the dead Tutsi man was asked to identify her husband's murderer. She refused, knowing that the Hutu man would be arrested, imprisoned, and perhaps killed in return. The woman said she preferred to remain silent. 'This is enough. This killing has to stop somewhere. One murder does not justify another killing.' So she chose to forgive."

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SIDNEY CALLAHAN

THE TROUBLE WITH ANGELS

My conversion experience

Retraction time again. I was wrong to cavalierly dismiss the existence of angels ("Filling the Gaps," March 24, 1995). My allergy to angels, you may recall, sprang partly from my distaste for the angelic hype sweeping the country, and worries that superstitious beliefs detract from the faith.

I now recant on the angel front for two reasons. First, just because a belief is crudely distorted doesn't mean that there's not a core of truth present. Second, there's such a weight of scriptural and liturgical testimony to the existence of angels that it has gradually beaten me down. After all, why belong to a traditional community of faith if it can't push you down paths you'd rather not take?

The fall's daily Masses celebrate the feast of Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael, archangels. Then a day later, just to rub it in, we participate in a memorial to the guardian angels. Now of all angels, I have the hardest time with guardian angels, probably because I was never imprinted in childhood with the guardian angel prayer.

I was also biased against guardian angels when early in my Catholic life my devout, highly educated neighbor used to leave her baby alone in her apartment, relying as she said, on the baby's guardian angel to protect her. "Even against fire?" I protested. "Please, please, let me babysit instead."

This is my problem with emphasizing the role of guardian angels—if they cannot be expected to protect against fire, and each robber and bad guy has his or her own angel, then how can guardian angels be intervening in the things going on in the world? One can always answer that without them things would be a lot worse, but disproving a negative is an impossible project.

Since I never could figure out the angel problem, I never taught my children anything about guardian angels. (I never told them there was a Santa Claus either.) As parents in a secularized milieu of rampant skepticism, we had enough trouble trying to defend and transmit even the central truths of the faith.

Yet compelling testimony to angels appears in every Mass when we ask the angels to pray for us in the opening penitential rite and then joyfully join with countless choirs of angels to sing hosannas and praise. I've also faithfully recited the Angelus for years as part of my Marian devotion, not even much noticing the angel element. Finally, I learned that Saint Thomas was called the "angelic doctor" because he wrote so much about angels. *Ergo*, angels can hardly be scrapped.

So now I've had a "angelophany!"—a delicious phrase I picked up reading scripture scholar Mary R. Thompson's analysis of Mary Magdala and the empty tomb story (*Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader*, Paulist). When in John's account, Thompson notes, Mary meets the two angels, "Verses 11–13 form an 'angelophany' and are a vestigial remnant of a traditional story which is too strong in the tradition to be omitted but which does not advance the narrative."

Aha! thought I, this comment may neatly sum up my present position. Angels are too strong an element in the tradition to be omitted, but I'm still puzzled how these spiritual messengers advance the central Christian narrative. Naturally, I was happy to learn that for centuries the Jews resisted naming the angels for fear they would detract from the sole sovereignty of God. The angelic function as God's messengers was the main and only point of early Jewish interest. Only much later did elaborate stories about the angels develop. These beliefs were then taken over by the early Christian church communities, as the Gospels attest.

Angels act as God's messengers and show up at very significant and Spirit-filled moments. But what exactly do angels add to the gospel narrative for us? I can see talk of angels as a way of symbolizing or dramatizing God's work in our daily lives; angels can be symbols of all the countless small positive "coincidences" that mark everyone's life. But a true affirmation of the reality of angels would have to accept them as real, whether humankind believed in them or not. That's what we mean by reality; unfortunately, it's independent from one's wishes or perceptions.

Looking for some help on the modern relevance of angels, I turned to my most recently purchased two-volume work on Roman Catholic systematic theology. *Nada*. There I found not a single index entry on angels, although the saints and Mary rate a whole chapter. Before I give up and expend energy in a theological library I'm left with my own resources on the angel question. At this point I'm accepting the existence of angels on the authority of the tradition and have only one other hard-won insight.

I accept the existence of angels as an element of the mysterious reality of God's plenitude. Obviously, with angelic choirs the creation must be a more complex, diverse, and manifold reality than one might want to imagine. Angels are a sign that God's goodness must be excessively fruitful; it overflows in creative energy. Infinite varieties of beings can be sustained and flourish in this good and bountiful system.

The moral ecology of paradise must be unimaginable to the likes of us. So if I'm still skeptical about the operation of guardian angels, surely it will be overlooked in my general assent to the good news. Besides, no self-respecting guardian angel would give up on his/her/its charge just because of sincere doubts. On second thought, perhaps all the angels despise the spread of vulgar superstitions about them. Yes, yes, I'm sure they do. Pass it on. □

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Jordan Bishop

SEPARATION ANXIETY

Quebec fails to secede

Even when it's finally over, it may not be over. That seems to be the consensus following October's hard-fought referendum on Quebec's separation from the rest of Canada. Those who sought independence failed by a slim percentage point. The *Oui* vote was 49.4 percent; the *Non* vote was 50.6 percent. By contemporary standards, the turnout was astronomical: 92 percent. Most Canadian elections manage to get something like 70 percent of eligible voters to the polls.

Canada is now back to square one. In a very real sense the vote was a resounding setback for Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, who, following in the footsteps of Pierre Trudeau, vehemently opposed any special status for Quebec. Admittedly, his position is not an easy one. The vote was, after all, a referendum within only the province of Quebec. Should a federal prime minister take sides? The side Chrétien did take was both obvious and predictable, but his tactics left much to be desired. He was convinced, up to the last days of the campaign, that once again, if the problem was ignored, it would go away. When the polls began to suggest that, far from going away, the "yes" side was ahead, Chrétien's less-than-inspiring speeches at the eleventh hour had little or no impact.

What was the referendum about? Basically it was about Quebec achieving sovereignty in the context of a negotiated relationship with the rest of Canada. Quebeckers were not asked to make a clean break with Canada. On the contrary, their provincial government, in posing the question of sovereignty on the referendum, envisaged a political relationship in which Quebeckers would retain Canadian citizenship, in which Canadian currency would be the coin of the realm, and in which the present commercial relationships would be retained. Perhaps the whole exercise boiled down to Quebeckers wanting formal recognition that they are a *nation*, distinct from the rest of Canada, a recognition they had not been allowed under present constitutional arrangements.

Unfortunately, most provincial premiers, particularly those in Western Canada, look at Canada as being a federation of ten equal provinces, much like the states in the American federation. But Canadian federalism has never functioned like this. Since the Lesage government in the 1960s, Quebec has had the exercise of substantial powers that other provinces do not have. It has its own pension plan and some control over immigration, and it practices interventionist economic policies that are taboo to the New Right in the rest of the country.

It could be argued that there is only one nation in Canada today, and that is Quebec with its French language, used as the primary language by over 80 percent of the population. The rest of Canada does not have the same sense of being a nation, and has never needed it. Flag-waving is alien to most Canadians, and some English Canadians were dismayed by the spate of it—literally—on the eve of the referendum. The English-speaking provinces are a collection of communities united by peace, order, and good government rather than by a strong nationalist sentiment. They are not a nation in the same sense as Quebec. (Quebec has a sizable anglophone and allophone—immigrants whose mother tongues are other than French or English—population. A majority of Quebec sovereignists strongly welcomes their continued presence and diversity.)

The obvious solution, known in Canada as the "two-nation" theory, is to accept the situation as it exists, and to forge realistic relationships between the Quebec nation and the rest of the country. Unfortunately, this is anathema to most political elites in English-speaking Canada.

The "two solitudes" are very real, as was clear in a nationwide constitutional referendum held in 1992. In theory, that referendum was about the ratification of a constitutional agreement worked out in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. But, in fact, the question took on a different meaning for Quebec. The Charlottetown agreement was eventually rejected by voters in all of Canada, but for very different reasons. In Quebec it lost because it did not recognize the province's status as a distinct society; in the other provinces it was rejected because it undermined federalism.

When it became apparent that the separatists might actually win the October 30 referendum, Quebec was deluged with protestations of undying love from the rest of Canada. These were, no doubt, heartfelt and sincere. But as Mme. Louise Baudouin, Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs, said on the night of the referendum, "Love is not enough. Give us some specifics. Love and the *status quo* are unacceptable."

As for the future, Quebec nationalists were unequivocal: The October 30 vote was not the end. As M. Lucien Bouchard, the *de facto* leader of the *Oui* forces, said, there will be another time, and it may be sooner than later. Jacques Parizeau, the Quebec premier, said the same thing following the vote, but in much harsher terms, blaming "money and the ethnic vote." It is true that only about 25 percent of Montreal's large ethnic contingent supported sovereignty, and that *Non* forces outside Quebec may have breached Quebec's spending limits by subsidizing travel to massive demonstrations staged in Montreal. But sovereignists immediately and almost unanimously disagreed with Parizeau's bitter words, and he resigned the next day.

What is to be done? Even a more independent Quebec must necessarily have some relationship with the rest of Canada. Is it possible to maintain the federation and yet

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structure it to the satisfaction of Quebec nationalists? The problem is political, but perhaps it is more difficult for the rest of Canada than for Quebec itself. The people of Quebec—and it is important to note that the Quebec leader of the *Non* forces, Daniel Johnson, habitually refers to *Quebec* as a *people*—do not really care what the rest of Canada does as long as they have their autonomy, as long as they can be, finally *maîtres chez eux*. Some political leaders in English Canada talk of a radical devolution of power, but demolishing the strong federal center would risk leaving Canada in a state of anarchy. Quebec's provincial government would still govern if that were to happen, but in the rest of the country, Ottawa might be prevented from doing so.

In a word, there is a serious crisis and it does not look as if it will go away, not in this century, not well into the next. The October 30 vote was, technically, a loss for Quebec sovereignists. But in fact, it proclaimed loudly and clearly that the problems the separatists pose for the rest of Canada urgently require a resolution. On Radio Canada's French language broadcast the night of the referendum, McGill University philosopher Charles Taylor said that what has struck him in the Canadian discussion of the Quebec question is its "lack of imagination." Following the narrow victory of the *Non*, most responsible Canadians agree there is a need for real change. But it remains to be seen whether there is the imagination to achieve it. □

Jordan Bishop *is a frequent contributor to* Commonweal. *He writes from Ottawa.*

Is Quebec Becoming Two Nations?

Not only did the October 30 referendum fail to resolve the question of the viability of the Canadian confederation, but, more ominously, it evidenced a severely divided Quebec. The deep ethnic and geographic cleavages in Quebec revealed by the referendum—the public statements by the leaders of the sovereignty movement and the passion engendered by the campaign—insure that the struggle to resolve Quebec's place in Canada will continue, and that it will be marked by divisiveness, rancor, and bitterness.

The vote illustrated just how far apart francophone and nonfrancophone Quebec have grown. Quebec is now composed of two populations with opposite and conflicting aspirations and perspectives. Francophones, 80 percent of Quebec's population, voted by a significant margin, 60 percent, in favor of sovereignty. The minority anglophone and allophone (those whose mother tongue is neither French nor English) voted in even greater proportions *against* sovereignty. The result was that the will of the majority community was electorally stalemated by the greater cohesion of the minority community. The potential for frustration and anger in the majority francophone community is enormous as, apparently, is the temptation to play on these feelings to advance political agendas. On election night, sovereignty leaders exploited feelings of francophone isolation and victimization. Premier Jacques Parizeau blamed the sovereignists' loss on big business and the "ethnic vote," and he declared that the referendum had not really been lost because more than 60 percent of francophones had backed sovereignty. The way to future victory, Parizeau argued, lay in greater ethnic solidarity, mobilizing 63 to 64 percent of the francophone population to opt for sovereignty.

Such statements will not draw anglophone and allophone voters to the sovereignty cause. Rather, they assure that sovereignty will remain a francophone aspiration that, if achieved, will be over the unified opposition of Quebec's minority communities who will certainly chafe under such a development and most likely also challenge its legitimacy.

The division of Quebec, however, is not merely ethnic. It is also increasingly geographic. Only three regions of the vast province voted against sovereignty: the Ontario border area (home of thousands of federal civil servants employed in nearby Ottawa); parts of the Eastern townships close to New England (an area with a history of anglophone settlements); and the island of Montreal. It was big, multicultural, international Montreal, home to the vast majority of Quebec's immigrants, that provided the margin of victory for the federalist cause. For Quebec sovereignists there is a cruel irony in the fact that Montreal, the world's window to Quebec culture and the stage on which Quebeckers present themselves to the world, has emerged as the stumbling block to sovereignty.

These deep divisions between English and French communities, between the metropolis and the regions, will make achieving a consensus on resolving Quebec's place in North America elusive. Moreover, they are not concerns easily addressed by constitutional tinkering.

CHARLES W. LEVESQUE

Charles W. Levesque, an attorney from Chicago, observed the referendum in Quebec.

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Christopher F. Koller

REFORMING HEALTH CARE

Managed care needs a cop

The debate in Congress over health-care policy has begun to resemble a Fellini movie—there is something important going on, but you can't quite tell what. You know that some of the scenes are quite funny. Most of them, though, leave one confused, even apprehensive.

Republicans, who tried to deny the existence of any health-care crisis when the Democrats ran Congress, have discovered several crises, especially the looming bankruptcy of the Medicare system. Democrats appear to have lost sight of any substantive health-care emergency, and have fallen instead upon a good and worthy whipping boy, the rich, who are supposed to benefit the most from the reduced federal spending proposed by Republicans. Medicare is either being "preserved and protected" or "gutted," depending on one's vantage point, while Medicaid will be either abandoned or liberated. Villains of the last political campaign (remember the pharmaceutical manufacturers?) are nowhere to be found, and new ones (usually federal bureaucrats) have emerged.

An unfettered managed-care industry is the centerpiece of the Republican Medicare proposal and many Medicaid reform plans (largely state run). To be sure, managed care's successes have been significant. Still, its limitations cannot be ignored. As the Republican-controlled Congress storms ahead with its proposals to reform the financing of public health-care insurance programs, it is important to address those limitations.

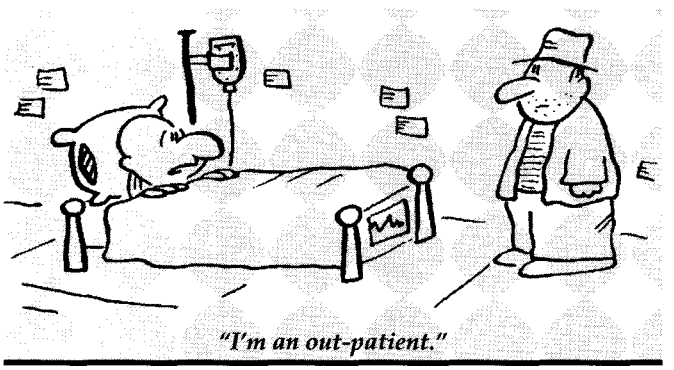
Managed care includes two basic components. An employer or other entity (such as the government) prepays an insurance organization (like a Health Maintenance Organization) for a predefined set of medical benefits delivered to its enrollees (members). In return, the enrollee agrees to receive care from a limited set of health-care providers and follow certain rules (which vary by HMO) for receiving that care.This Faustian bargain—of a limited provider network and access rules in return for full coverage—linking the provider, the HMO, and the patient in the financing and delivery of care, is the only proven way until now to control health-care costs in the United States. It is responsible for the relatively flat rate of increase in private health-insurance costs in the last few years, and actual decrease in 1995. Managed-care membership has grown by two-thirds in the last four years, to almost one quarter of the U.S. population. In most surveys, clients using managed-care systems report equivalent or higher levels of satisfaction compared with those enrolled in traditional indemnity health-insurance programs.

As managed care has grown, so has the ability to analyze and address the wide variations in clinical practice in the United States today. For example, regional per capita surgery rates for certain common procedures such as cataract operations, Caesarean sections, and prostatectomies have been shown to be determined by the number of specialists available to perform them, and not the underlying condition of the patient. Also, managed-care organizations, particularly those which incorporate physician group practices, have the ability to integrate and coordinate preventive medicine and medical care in ways that the fragmented traditional system or looser network form of HMOs cannot.

More important, managed care can be seen as the first, tentative step toward acknowledging the finite nature of resources available. Everybody cannot have everything, and so some limits—in access, in doctors—must be observed. This is of small consolation to those with no insurance who have poor access to care, but the managed-care revolution has begun to make all Americans more aware of the dirty little secret that we already ration care in the United States.

Managed care has its shortcomings. Complaints generally concern either the reduction of choice in selecting a provider, or Byzantine rules for obtaining approvals from HMOs to receive needed care. Such charges are often driven by anecdotal experience—one person's specialist is not on the HMO's physician list, or another repeatedly must ask "Mother May I?" over the telephone for permission for a particular service. Quality-of-care is supposedly compromised by organizations with a potential incentive to contract with less than top-notch providers; medically necessary services are denied or forestalled, patients are sent home sick from the hospital.

By setting up hurdles rather than improving effectiveness and appropriateness of care, HMOs often do succumb to reducing costs by managing access rather than managing care. Too often the quality of care managed by an HMO depends on the good judgment of the institution, rather than the standards of regulators, participating providers, or informed customers. However, complaints that managed-care organizations make money by saying "no" greatly oversimplies matters. Internal and external advocacy for the patient is strong. HMOs survive by keeping people healthy, not by postponing care. As with any organization that exercises authority, the potential exists for errors in judgment, and with health



"I'm an out-patient."

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care the stakes are obviously high. Given the failure of more comprehensive health-care reform and the lack of support for government- based single-payer systems, the policy debate will continue to focus on Medicare and Medicaid, and on how to use public financing of private-sector operations to improve efficiencies. The future is unabashed incrementalism for those who favor a right to health care and a major government role in meeting that right.

If managed care is part of the reform, how can we work to make the result as fair as possible? It is important to recognize that only the federal government can create the circumstances in which managed care can succeed for Medicare and Medicaid. First, government can create markets for public-health insurance. As an HMO manager, I am the first to admit that increased competition in our local market has improved the value of our services, forcing us to innovate and to reduce our costs by identifying and eliminating unnecessary and wasteful services.The powerful incentives created by the market should be brought to bear on reducing the government's health-care expenses. Second, just as you cannot rely on virtue to hold down costs, neither can you rely on it to ensure quality. Economists inform us that markets need perfect information to function. Information is far from perfect in health insurance or health care, so the government must define the rules of the game. It must define minimum benefit packages, and ensure minimum standards for the organizations that provide them. The government is the largest purchaser of health care in America, and just as it has redefined standards for hospital and physician payments, it should not shirk from its oversight obligations elsewhere.

There are disturbing elements in the Republican proposals, especially as the Republicans sweetened the pot for certain constituencies. Physician support for a program which will reduce physician compensation was bought by relaxing standards for referring patients to self-owned diagnostic facilities. If a physician makes more money by ordering a marginally useful lab test for you, what will he do? Even more dangerous are proposals to allow loosely regulated quasi-HMOs, sponsored by hospitals, physicians, or employer groups to enroll Medicare recipients. These plans, unless closely monitored, would be hard pressed to develop the clinical and management expertise necessary to insure high quality care for enrollees.

More significant than concerns over the quality of care provided by HMOs for the commercially insured population are questions about care for those for whom the government has assumed responsibility—the aged, infirm, and impoverished. Republican plans for health-care reform extol the virtues of free choice driving innovation and value. Given the difficulty even the most self-actualized of us have in deducing what we are paying for with health care, presumably society's most vulnerable populations will fare even worse. The three labyrinthine paths mapped out by congressional Republicans: traditional Medicare, managed Medicare, and Medisave accounts hardly meet criteria of simplicity. Medisave accounts, which give the option for recipients to bank their personal Medicare payments and purchase minimal catastrophic insurance, are particularly worrisome. This would create enormous disincentives to seeking the preventive and primary-care services which reduce the incidence of serious disease and the suffering and larger expenses such illness brings. The fact that this care package may have been freely chosen by the recipient would be inconsequential. A government-sponsored managed-care proposal must meet the test of simplicity. The Republican reforms fail that test, as did Clinton's health package. Offering an array of managed-care plans to the presently uninsured where population density supports it, would provide adequate choice and greater simplicity than the current proposal.

Government must also help to equalize access to care. Under the congressional welfare reform bill, impoverished Americans will no longer be entitled to basic medical care. By shifting more authority over Medicaid programs to states, the federal government abdicates its responsibility to ensure equal protection for all its citizens. In policy making, where you end up depends on where you start. If vocal seniors had not entrenched the federal financing role for Medicare in the sixties, Republicans certainly would be trying to unload the program to the states, as they have done with less vocal Medicaid recipients.

Access to health care should be a fundamental right for U.S. citizens. The moral justification for equality and distributive justice in health care is much stronger than for virtually any other good or service. If the federal government is going to define the rules of the market, it has to make sure everybody has the resources to go through the check-out line. If that requires tax breaks or subsidies, so be it.

Finally, all health insurance depends on subsidization. The healthy subsidize the sick, the wealthy subsidize the poor, and the community subsidizes the training of new care providers. While the demands of justice dictate a strong federal role in the financing of health care, the delivery of care is an intensely personal and local experience, starting with the individual's own attitudes toward self and wellness. These need to be arbitrated and negotiated in our communities—the doctor's office, the home, and the school. Bureaucratic by nature, government cannot deliver medical care, but it can hold managed-care organizations responsible for promoting health standards for all. Health behaviors can be changed and improved: you can get parents to stop smoking and kids not to start; you can reduce teen-age pregnancies and improve pediatric immunization rates. These are social goods which the market does not recognize, and that government must pursue either directly or indirectly. Community minded managed-care organizations can play critical roles in this process.

Strong federal oversight must be incorporated into the Republicans' managed-care programs if Medicare enrollees are to benefit from these proposed changes. □

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LOADED AT THE TOP

Where productivity gains land

Robert A. Senser

When I first went job-hunting, my uncle told me: "Remember, the harder you work, the more money you'll make." Later, economists and editorialists tried to teach me a similar lesson: the more productive workers are, the higher the real wages they earn. In its 1995 report, the Council of Economic Advisers, echoing the same point in almost the same words, reinforced it by adding: "Few propositions in economics are as well documented...or command as much support among professional economists, whatever their political persuasion."

My uncle's prediction, I have long realized, was faulty. Now it turns out that even a proposition propagated by economists of all political persuasions can be flawed: The pay increases of workers in recent years have consistently lagged behind increases in productivity. To take one yardstick from the Bureau of Labor Statistics: between 1982 and 1994, labor productivity in nonfarm businesses increased at a rate nearly three times that of the real hourly compensation of workers in the same sector. Workers in manufacturing plants did much worse. Their hourly compensation (wages and benefits combined) remained flat while productivity zoomed 37 percent. The same trends continue through late 1995, leading Secretary of Labor Robert Reich to comment: "There is something wrong with rising profits, rising productivity, and a soaring stock market but employee compensation heading nowhere."

My uncle was right in believing that if I worked harder and thus became more productive, I would generate more wealth, but he was wrong in assuming that I would necessarily be the direct beneficiary. The rewards could go elsewhere, to those in a better position to claim them, such as to the owners of the Chicago department store where I held my first job. Likewise, any overall increase in productivity, whether in a factory, in an industry, or in the nation as a whole, creates more wealth, but who gets it is another matter. It isn't shared mechanically by some static formula. It goes to those in the best position to claim it.

The CEOs of large corporations and members of their boards are very visibly in a better position than workers to make that claim. And they do: the total compensation of these CEOs now comes to around 150 times that of the average worker; back in 1974, the ratio was about 35 to 1. The 1994 median salary and bonuses received by the CEOs of the 800 biggest publicly held U.S. corporations was $993,000, an 11 percent jump over 1993, according to a *Forbes* magazine (May 22, 1995) survey. When stock options and other forms of compensation are included, the median take came to $1.3 million. Further, a consultancy's survey of the 200 largest industrial companies revealed that the average annual pay of members of their boards (themselves mostly top corporate executives) was $68,300, or roughly $700 an hour. That same year, 1994, the earnings of nonsupervisory workers in the private sector averaged $11.13 an hour.

A few years ago the media and even some conservatives frequently poured scorn on self-enrichment in the executive suite. I have a big file of business press clippings with headlines like "The Wacky, Wacky World of Executive Pay" (*Fortune*, September 6, 1988) and "CEO Pay: Baffling, Disgraceful, Sickening, Embarrassing, Infuriating" (*Industry Week*, April 15, 1991).

My favorite is a George Will column titled "Ripping Off Capitalism" (*Washington Post*, September 1, 1991). From the title and the byline, you might expect a blast against big government for ruining business. But no. Will turned his wrath against corporate America: "Perhaps Reebok's CEO was

"I'm sure you'll all agree it can't help the company image to see me well down in the list of top chairmen's salaries."

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worth $14.8 million in 1990, but why, precisely? He would have done his job less well for a piddling, oh, $7 million? He would have left the company if paid less? Would the company have done worse with a $7 million—or even $1 million—replacement?" Will castigated the widening disparity between the compensation of top executives and that of ordinary workers. "The American CEO/worker [income] disparity doubled during the 1980s," he wrote, because the executives in effect raised their own salaries. "How do you distinguish between money earned and money merely taken?"

Now, fast forward to April 23, 1995, when the *Washington Post* published Will on a kindred subject with a different perspective, one that looked with favor on the lopsided accumulation of riches. "A society that values individualism, enterprise, and a market economy," Will wrote, "is neither surprised nor scandalized when the unequal distribution of marketable skills produces large disparities in the distribution of wealth....Certainly there is today no *prima facie* case against the moral acceptability of increasingly large disparities of wealth." Will praised American society for valuing "equality, sensibly understood," meaning that it "offers upward mobility equally to all who accept its rewarding disciplines."

In the moral environment contaminated by that kind of rationale, income inequalities grew: in fact, they "widened alarmingly" starting in the late 1970s, to quote the Council of Economic Advisers again. The real income of men with only four years of high school, for example, dropped a "stunning" 21 percent between 1979 and 1990. "In concert, the market and the government [by weakening the social safety net, for example] produced the greatest disequalization of incomes since at least before World War II, " the council reported.

The trend toward greater inequality shows up even more strongly in the distribution of wealth. The widening gap is exhaustively documented by Edward N. Wolff, professor of economics at New York University (*Top Heavy: A Study of the Increasing Inequality of Wealth in America*, Twentieth Century Fund). From 1983 to 1989, Wolff found, the top 1 percent of households increased their net worth from 34 to 39 percent of all household wealth, while that of the bottom 80 percent dropped from 18 to 15 percent. The only other period in this century with a comparable surge in the concentration of wealth was the seven-year span that preceded the Crash of 1929. And this trend has not stopped in succeeding years. New Federal Reserve Board data show that the top 1 percent of U.S. wealth holders increased their share from 39 percent in 1989 to 42 percent in 1992, thus reaching a sixty-two-year high.

Racial minorities have fared the worst, reversing gains that had slightly narrowed a large wealth gap between them and whites. In 1983, the median white family had eleven times the wealth of the median nonwhite family. By 1989 this ratio had grown to twenty.

It is almost impossible to quantify the various causes of this widening gap, but Lawrence Mishel and Jared Bernstein of the Economic Policy Institute have tried (*The State of Working America 1994-1995*, M.E. Sharpe). Focusing on wages and salaries, which make up about 75 percent of family income, they attribute rising inequality primarily to three clusters of overlapping factors:

- Globalization of the U.S. economy, including competition from low-wage countries and large-scale immigration, accounts for an estimated 15 to 25 percent of the total.
- Expansion of the lower-paid service jobs as the manufacturing sector shrank accounts for 20 to 30 percent.
- Weakening of wage-setting institutions, deunionization, a decline in union bargaining power in unionized offices and factories, and the erosion of government labor standards (for example, the decline in the value of the minimum wage, frozen at $4.25 an hour since 1991) account for 30 to 35 percent.

Other factors, not quantified by Mishel and Bernstein, include regressive tax policies, the growth of small business, privatization of government services, contracting out of services by private companies, and the sharp increase in the number of workers, especially women, who hold temporary or part-time jobs.

Two other economists, Robert H. Frank of Cornell and Philip J. Cook of Duke, take another approach (*Winner-Take-All Society*, The Free Press). They describe the U.S. economy as radically changed by the spread of "winner-take-all" markets—meaning that the superstar model of rewards long common in entertainment and sports is now common in a large and growing number of fields. Transformed into "celebrity labor markets," with a few superstars earning superhigh incomes and often becoming superwealthy, these fields cover a lot of territory: law, journalism, consulting, medicine, investment banking, corporate management, publishing, design, fashion, and even academia. At the same time, earnings have escalated for millions whom Frank and Cook call "minor league superstars"—salespeople, administrators, accountants, physicians, dentists, psychologists, and others in the labor markets of more everyday life. With "small differences in performance [turned into] large differences in economic reward," the spread of winner-take-all markets has contributed most of the push to widening the economic and social distance between the rich and poor.

Besides labor markets, on which Frank and Cook concentrate their analysis, the financial markets have a role of their own in fostering disparities in income and wealth. Take the booming stock market, in which the wealthiest 10 percent of Americans own around 90 percent of the shares. Each tick upward in the Dow adds substantially to the net worth of the most well-off. Or as *Forbes* magazine (October 18, 1995) puts it: "The tremendous increase in the stock market rubbed off nicely on the superrich." A decade ago it required a mere $150 million in wealth to gain admission to *Forbes'* annual

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list of the 400 richest Americans. By 1995 the entry fee had more than doubled: to $340 million.

Herbert Stein of the American Enterprise Institute concedes that inequality has increased, but doesn't see "that [it] calls for any policy response." His fellow economists quoted above all think it does, and each has a set of prescriptions as do many other experts. But all these reform proposals would require some type of governmental action at a time when the federal government is pictured as monstrous and federal regulation as evil. Indeed, some of those responsible for those fraudulent images are simply hypocrites: they systematically use the government's regulatory powers and the public's tax dollars to advance their own ends, financial, political, and ideological, but are working for legislation that would keep others from using the same means to better their lot.

For one example of a policy proposal, Edward Wolff makes a case for supplementing the income tax with a modest federal tax on wealth holdings, modeled after one in Switzerland. But whatever the argument in its favor, it is a loser. One of the arguments against it, that a wealth tax would harm economic growth, seems to have greater salience than the fact that Switzerland is not suffering from impoverishment. Unfortunately, concern about widening inequality causes only an occasional blip on the radar screen of public policy.

Public figures seldom challenge the beneficent workings of the market. Within the Clinton administration's top levels, Secretary of Labor Reich stands almost alone in trying to make fairness for workers a national issue. The only presidential candidate who consistently raises his voice against the decline of living standards is Pat Buchanan, and he gets dismissed as somewhat of a kook for a variety of other reasons. In blasting NAFTA and GATT for discriminating against American workers, for example, he ignores the fact that current international trade agreements discriminate against all workers, wherever in the world they may be, in favor of owners of capital, wherever they may be.

Among top economists, Paul Krugman, professor at Stanford University, is a rarity who regularly expresses concern about the "crisis" in which "economic forces are more and more tending to split society in two: between those who have good jobs and whose standards of living continue to rise and those who are faced with either falling incomes or the prospect of more-or-less permanent life on the dole." In the summer 1994 issue of *Foreign Policy*, for example, Krugman wrote: "Even an economist can see that such a split demoralizes those on the bottom and coarsens those on the top. The ultimate effect of growing economic disparities on our social and political health may be hard to predict, but it is unlikely to be pleasant."

Some day there may be a revulsion against market-made disparity, but meantime it prevails. When the 110-year-old *Houston Post* was buried in the spring of 1995 with a loss of 1,900 full-time and part-time jobs, the *Economist* (April 29) published an obituary with this insightful analysis :

> Newspaper publishing in America is a different business from what it was before the 1960s and 1970s. Once it was enough for papers to break even or to make a modest profit for their proprietors and their families. With most larger papers now in the hands of national chains or stock-market-traded corporations, the pressure for steadily increasing profits is relentless. From the *New York Times* down, few papers, large or small, have managed to escape.

The same drive—the drive not just for profits at levels once considered reasonable, but for higher and higher profits, no matter what—afflicts many other industries, national and global: the U.S. housing construction industry, for example, to the detriment of low-income families who need affordable homes, and the international shipping industry, to the detriment of seafarers of both industrialized and developing nations, who are often victimized by new global economic pressures.

With eyes willing to see, identifying how greed is infecting more and more of our land is not all that difficult. Greed's contagion in the global economy is less obvious, but can be discovered through extensive reading and now by surfing the Internet. Of all the research tools for detecting greed, though, the most neglected is introspection.

Recently, after reading an article about how "hot money" was financing much of China's economic growth, I had to consult the *Penguin Dictionary of Economics* to learn exactly what hot money means: "funds which flow into a country to take advantage of favorable rates of interest." When I lamented this trend, a friend of mine shook his head and said: "So what do you think your pension fund is doing? Looking for the lowest possible return?"

As I thought about it, my pension fund came to symbolize the long and impersonal reach of market forces. Me, a greedy capitalist? Couldn't be. But is my money earning profits in a joint venture with the People's Liberation Army using forced prison labor in the People's Republic of China? Is it helping finance a company that hires grade-school-aged children to make garments in Bangladesh or shoes in Brazil? I have absolutely no idea. Belatedly, the manager of my pension fund is exploring the option of shifting our money into one of the new breed of "socially responsible" funds. These kinds of plans cover only a tiny portion of the whole investment market, which is expanding explosively now that even more and more middle-class people are salting away their money impersonally in personal investments.

With all the current talk about personal responsibility, one would think that more of us would be asking a few questions about where our investment (and consumer) dollars go and about how they are used. One would think so, yes, and one might even exercise some responsibility, if one really thought about it. □

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A HERO OF VATICAN II

Yves Congar

Joseph A. Komonchak

The Second Vatican Council ended thirty years ago, on December 8, 1965. As I am often reminded by my students, sometimes playfully, sometimes painfully, there is now a whole generation of Catholics who have no personal memory of that event. Its context has to be reconstructed for them, the dynamics of its drama identified and explained, its final acts registered. Its impact is visible in the class that sits before me in the course I teach on the foundations of theology: most of them are young Catholics, five of them are Protestants, one is an Orthodox layman from Bulgaria, two of them are Muslims, one of whom startled me by writing "In the Name of Allah" at the top of his paper. Things have changed in the Catholic church, and at The Catholic University of America.

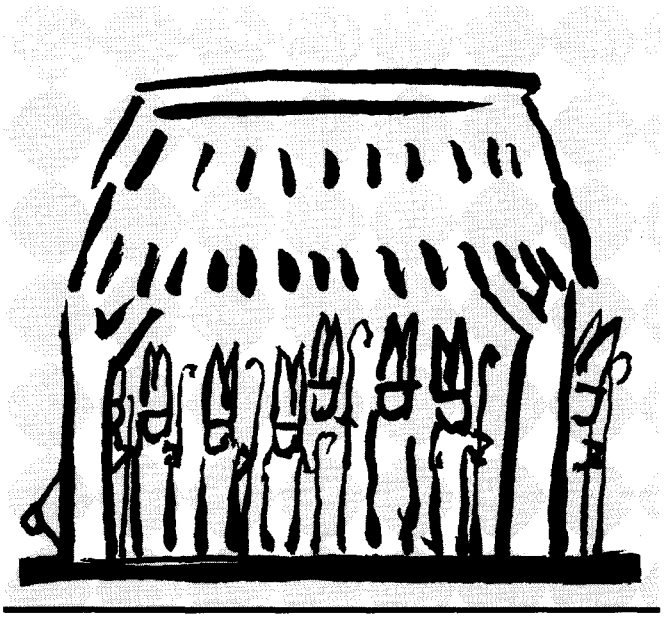
Yves Congar, O.P., failed by six months to see this latest anniversary of Vatican II. Few scholars did more than he to make the council possible, few participants had a greater impact on the documents that express the council's thought, few lives embody more clearly the great turning point in the life of the church that the council represented. What follows is a grateful tribute to him and to God for the council.

In July 1960, Congar learned that he had been appointed to the Theological Commission established to prepare texts for consideration by the Second Vatican Council. Rumors that his appointment, and that of Henri de Lubac, had been ordered by Pope John XXIII were not enough to convince him that their presence would be able to affect the largely conservative orientation of the commission. He feared that their presence would be used as a proof that the commission was open and representative of various schools—"The shop-window advertises de Lubac, but inside there is only Gagnebet" [a second-rate Roman theologian]. He further feared that the appointment would prevent him from being able to criticize texts on which he was not likely to have much influence. If, in the end, he could not responsibly turn down the appointment, he did reserve the right to resign if he found himself involved in a work that would do harm to his life-long commitments, especially to ecumenism. He wrote in his journal:

> I want to offer loyally what I can do in the framework of the council opened by John XXIII under the Holy Spirit's impulse. I will not indulge in flattery or compromise, but I do want to participate, loyally and humbly, in this very great work. I pray every day that I can offer myself in this way, that God not allow deceitful and ambitious men to take it over, that he preserve our Pope John and strengthen him....I want to serve the truth. Sincerely and humbly I will try to do so in the path that has been opened to me.

A few weeks later Congar received outlines of four texts which the Theological Commission intended to prepare. Asked to comment, he turned his response into a general statement of his own views on the conciliar agenda. In late September he sent Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the head of the commission, sixteen pages of comments, written in French. He also sent copies of the comments to all the other members and consultors of the commission.

His remarks began by noting that the pope had assigned the promotion of Christian unity as the remote purpose of the council, something that imposed a heavy responsibility upon churchmen. In what world would the council be meeting, he asked? A world where one person in four is Chinese and one in three lives under Communist domination, where Christians are divided, where colonialism and paternalism



THE REVEREND JOSEPH A. KOMONCHAK *teaches theology in the Department of Religion and Religious Education, The Catholic University of America. He is the editor of the English edition of the* History of Vatican II, *whose first volume has just been published by Orbis.*

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are under criticism, where women are advancing. He concluded:

> To my mind, all the work of the council should be undertaken as if before the eyes of *this very* world, as if it were watching us, and by considering the realities I have just too briefly evoked. Unless the remote finality of serving Christian unity is merely verbal, the council's work should also be undertaken as if under the eyes of *other* Christians and without ever losing sight of its duty to serve, from afar, but effectively, the cause of unity.

Unfortunately, Congar went on, the outlines of the four proposed texts addressed questions more appropriate to 1870, when the First Vatican Council was meeting, than to 1960. The text on revelation and faith concentrated on questions of formal authority while ignoring the heart of the saving relationship between God and his people. The draft on the church focused on its societal and hierarchical nature and needed to be supplemented by a biblically guided consideration of the church as the Mystical Body, by greater acknowledgment of its eschatological character and its implications for the relationship between church and world and church and kingdom, by greater attention to the laity and to bishops, by a rethinking of the church-state relationship. The text on contemporary errors he found too negative, needing to be prefaced by "a positive profession of Christian faith and hope, entirely composed of statements based on the Word of God." The style used in the *Syllabus of Errors* was no longer effective; the council should instead speak biblically, kerygmatically, and pastorally. As for the questions of individual and social morality addressed in the fourth text, these should not rest solely on the natural law, should be modest and nuanced in details ("Remember Galileo!"), and should include the question of war and peace and atomic weapons, religious freedom (including within the church: the *Index of Forbidden Books*, the disciplining of theologians), and the problem of secularization.

Congar concluded with remarks about the ecumenical finality of the council. The Theological Commission should collaborate closely with the newly founded Secretariate for Christian Unity, work to explain Catholic positions, address Orthodox and Protestant difficulties, acknowledge the genuine concerns and values that lie behind them, and reconsider some of the practical points of discipline they find problematic, such as the denial of the chalice to the laity, clerical celibacy, and the prohibition of the vernacular in the liturgy.

This text of Congar summarized the concerns that had marked his life-work up to this point. On many of the theological issues he had done major historical work, particularly in the Fathers and medieval theologians. But that effort to recover the broader and richer tradition before polemical constraints had narrowed and hardened much Catholic theology and doctrinal statements, was matched by an evangelical commitment to his own world and particularly to those groups, Christian and non-Christian, who were alienated from the church or found some of its teachings and practices incomprehensible. There were vast areas of the world to which the gospel had to be preached and in which the church had yet to be incarnated. As his text reveals, for Congar *ressourcement* (the return to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (Pope John's term for adaptation) were not incompatible or even competing interests. No criticism recurs more often in his journal of Vatican II than the dichotomy favored at Rome between doctrine and practice.

As is well known, Congar's interests and writings had also caused him much grief for over twenty years, culminating in six years of exile and discipline which his appointment to the commission was bringing to an apparent end. A struggle remained, however. When he went to Rome

Hilary Holladay

Snail

Twisting around
at the sound of wind
I inch below ice
patched with oak leaves.
It is winter, nearly Christmas.
I ooze a trail of joy.

Nobody sees
my contentment
with drainage problems,
decaying roots.
While you're all traveling
buying gifts
I'm here, where
humus grows.

And the footsteps
bearing down
on my fragile domain
make my soul
smile

for I am still as stone,
the inhaled breath
of a holy scene.

I am random
I am good
I am a closed eye
staring at God.

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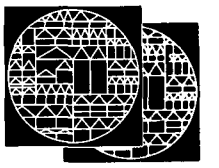
for the first meeting of the Theological Commission, he found he was still under Roman suspicion: a member of the Holy Office was quoted as having said of him, "He's the most scholarly theologian, but there are three heresies on every page." He was told that his concerns were not widely shared in Rome. There would be no need to collaborate with the Secretariate for Christian Unity; issues such as atomic weapons were not of great concern; the dogmatic texts the commission would prepare would avoid merely "pastoral" concerns such as ecumenism and the laity; the primary need was not for the council to offer a positive and coherent statement of the faith but to issue a renewed warning against contemporary errors.

For the next eighteen months of preparation, it was the Holy Office's perspectives that guided the commission's work and determined its texts. Congar and de Lubac prepared a few study papers and regularly criticized the official drafts, but they had little effect. Congar would later accuse himself of not having been aggressive enough within the commission, but there is little indication that his presence was considered by the leaders of the commission as more than an inconvenience that had to be tolerated. As the council began, the texts it was supposed to consider were faithful to the original program, and the fears Congar had expressed in his journal seemed all to have been realized.

The rest of the story is familiar. At the first session of the council, the official texts of the Theological Commission were severely criticized and remanded to new working groups on which the Secretariate for Christian Unity would be well represented. The majority of bishops made it clear that their own concerns were far closer to those of Congar than to those of the Holy Office. Over the next three years, Congar exercised major influences on the council's texts on divine revelation, the church, ecumenism, religious freedom, and the church in the modern world. He was later to say that the council's achievement had exceeded his dreams; and in fact there is scarcely a single one of the concerns that he outlined in his 1960 paper that was not taken up by the council and pursued in the manner he recommended.

Vatican II took place at the midpoint of Congar's work. In the decades that followed, he continued his scholarly endeavors, publishing many important articles and books. While not uncritical of many postconciliar developments, he retained a confidence in the continued guidance of the Spirit that many others were unable to muster. Confined by a debilitating bone disease to a hospital for the eight years before his death, his mind remained sharp and his spirit bold. In December 1994, Pope John Paul II gave official recognition of his own and the church's debts to Congar by naming him a cardinal. Congar was grateful for the honor, which he referred less to himself than to the concerns he had addressed, to the work he had contributed, and to the council that had confirmed the first and made use of the second. "I want to serve the truth," he told Rome in 1960, and when he died last June 22, he could do so with the knowledge that Rome, finally, was grateful. □



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Richard Alleva

LOOK AT HIM

John Travolta in 'Get Shorty'

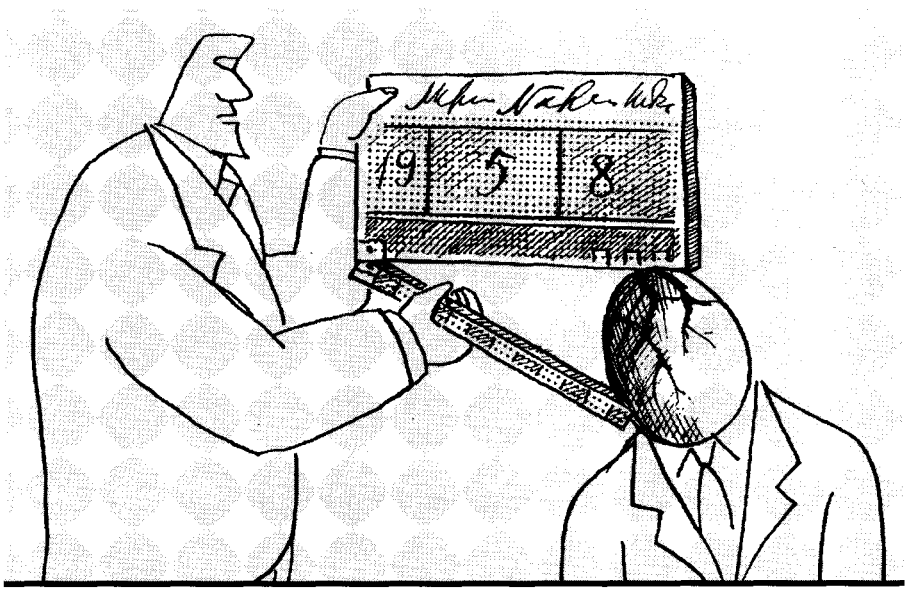
Few of us can enact our dreams in our jobs. That lawyer so diligently adding codicils to your will may harbor fantasies of piloting a B-52. It's not easy or practical to switch careers in midlife, so the fantasies must remain just that: the occupations of our unseen selves. *Get Shorty* is a comedy—an insouciantly violent comedy—about a job switch that fulfills a man's fantasies, and the comedy arises from the fact that the skills of his quondam trade propel the hero successfully into the profession of his dreams. A gangster becomes a moviemaker precisely because he is so good at being a gangster.

When we first met Chili Palmer, an intelligent and rather pleasant young loan shark, he is staring out a restaurant window in Miami. Indifferent to his business partner's small talk, he fantasizes about buying the condemned film theater across the street and turning it into a classic movie revival house. When a more prominent gangster, Barboni, saunters up to their table, Chili's partner is properly obsequious but Palmer at first doesn't even look at him. Barboni is a brutal pig of a man, and his nature makes him perfect for his work. By contrast, Chili seems detached from the realities of his job, almost ethereal. Can this daydreamer really be a gangster? He seems more interested in movies than collecting debts.

Then we see him in action. Ray Barboni, having lost his own coat, casually lifts Chili's black leather jacket from the restaurant's cloak room. Palmer tracks the hoodlum to his lair, breaks his nose with one fast punch, and takes back his property.

You see, the jacket makes Chili look like Al Pacino in *Serpico*. One just doesn't mess with a movie lover's fantasy life.

This encounter—so economically violent that it makes you gasp and laugh at the same time—both establishes the movie's tone and launches its point. Circumstances place our hero in his enemy's power and Barboni sends him to the West Coast to collect money from a supposedly dead man. But Chili gets Hollywood fever and conducts very fast raids on a series of alien turfs until he gets into precisely the position he covets: the power to make movies.



Chili rarely uses force. Why would he want to hurt people whose trust and aid he might someday need? Besides, he's got an entire arsenal to draw upon: charm, humor, flattery, sexuality, reasonableness, and—most auspiciously—threat. "Look at me," commands Chili repeatedly. And when people see the loan-shark look on his face, a look that tells them they must comply with his logic for want of any solution of their own, they usually crumble. He "reads" them, they can't "read" him, so he wins. Moving within a milieu in which daydreaming, roleplaying, and con games are rife, Chili's certainty of purpose is his clout. He bluffs the bluffers with a confidence they can only envy.

The cunning of Elmore Leonard's book lies in the way it shows us that all the characters, not just Chili, are constantly running movies in the screening rooms of their minds, and that stratagems, manners, even morals, are determined by what each Hollywood "player" has learned from filmgoing. Oddly, this effect is easier to bring off in a novel than a movie. If a film director were to continually insert the movie scenes by which the characters measure reality, he would risk turning *Get Shorty* into an anthology of old movie clips instead of a good, brisk crime comedy.

Director Barry Sonnenfeld and scriptwriter Scott Frank have chosen a much simpler course: They have the characters constantly refer to movies they've seen, but the real focus is on the strategies and power plays of Chili and his friends and enemies, and we can see for ourselves that the ploys are movie-influenced. So, while the book was basically about the meta-reality experienced by movie-minded people, the movie is more conventional: a comedy about how well-equipped a smart gangster is to swim in the shark-infested waters of Hollywood.

At times, Frank and Sonnenfeld have coarsened the material by straining for laughs and thrills that Leonard, a laid-back storyteller if there ever was one, never intended the material to evoke. By the time one of the Escobar drug lords

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arrives on the scene, there have been one murder and two beatings too many. And for all the movie's energy and pace, my disbelief wasn't always suspended. Wouldn't the roughneck flung by our hero down a flight of steps in a chic restaurant attract a flutter of concerned waiters? Elmore made this plausible in the book; Sonnenfeld doesn't even try. And he hasn't done well by a couple of his actors. Danny DeVito is miscast as a superstar sought by Palmer to make a project financeable. The star is supposed to be in the DeNiro-Pacino mold: unhandsome but magnetic, not a matinee idol but definitely a star. It's not DeVito's height but his lack of glamour that makes him a burlesque of the role. Rene Russo is well cast as a shrewd actress but has been allowed by the director to give a too tightly corseted, grim performance.

On the other hand, Sonnenfeld and Frank have done many things well. The pace and shape of each scene are calculated to wring every drop of irony and gallows humor out of the material. Many scenes have the feel of comedy sketches but are never allowed to become so farcical that they burst the framework of the story. And, if DeVito and Russo have been mishandled, the rest of the cast is excellent. Gene Hackman and Dennis Farina work successfully toward opposite goals: Hackman, as a hapless producer, makes his usually massive presence seem clutsy, pathetic, dopey, while Farina puffs himself up believably to project Barboni's repulsive thuggishness. Delroy Lindo is on the verge of being typecast but, here playing yet another gangster, still manages to be fearsome in surprising ways.

But, let's face it, all this is prologue. The make-or-break question is, just how good is John Travolta as Chili Palmer?

He's perfect. I mean that quite literally. Even in great performances, there may exist a slight lack of congruence between actor and role. The other day, I caught *A Streetcar Named Desire* again on TV and noticed a certain daintiness in Brando's demeanor (during his quieter moments) that didn't seem to belong to Stanley Kowalski. This performance is as great as any in American film (certainly greater than anything Travolta has done), but Brando unconsciously lets us know that he is too large for the role even as he illuminates it.

But Travolta, a much narrower actor than Brando, is completely at one with Palmer. There is nothing in his personality or physique that he hasn't tailored for the character. The very way he holds his cigarette delivers an aspect of the man. And, most importantly, Travolta knows how to flick on and off the menace in Palmer's eyes, to replace instantaneously the threat of harm with the promise of friendship, or vice versa. It is this flexible steeliness that makes the gangster memorable.

Some great movies don't give us great characters while some merely good films do. *8 1/2* is probably greater than *La Strada*, but it's the latter that gave us Gelsomina and Zampano. This new movie is just a good minor work, but it may attain a certain classic status because of its hero. *Get Shorty* has given us Chili Palmer. □

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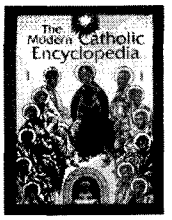

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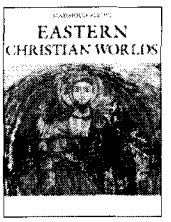

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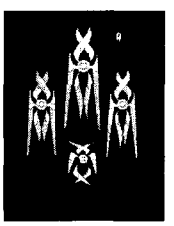

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Critics' choices for Christmas

Jack Miles

Jack Miles is director of the Humanities Center at the Claremont Graduate School, Claremont, California, and author of God: A Biography *(Knopf).*

A *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, David Lyle Jeffrey, general editor (William B. Eerdmans, $75, 960 pp.), is a book that re-establishes its premise with a kind of loving exuberance on every page. It is something of a commonplace that no book in English literature is more important than the Bible, a book that, of course, was originally not a part of English literature at all. But how true is that claim, finally?

The particular joy of Jeffrey's dictionary is that while demonstrating that, yes indeed, the Bible is everywhere in English literature, it takes you to places in English literature that you haven't been and, even better, to places in European literature that you have never thought of visiting.

William B. Eerdmans is a publishing house with a Protestant Evangelical tradition. But Jeffrey, one of whose several books is *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (1975), has written what I would call a Catholic book.

Bible scholarship of the usual historical sort is mostly trapped in a period from about 1200 B.C. to about A.D. 200. The process by which the Bible made its way from its complex Eastern Mediterranean origins into European literature and through Europe into England—well, whoever teaches that, Bible scholars usually don't. To an extent, the usual biblical curriculum reflects a Protestant tendency to leap directly from Paul to Luther as one might fly from coast to coast, not much noticing the Mississippi Valley. Figuratively speaking, Jeffrey spends plenty of time along the Mississippi.

The endorsements that this book arrived with in 1992 included some—I speak as a jaded erstwhile book editor—that are not to be had at any price: John Updike, Frank Kermode, Robertson Davies, John Macquarrie, Bruce Metzger, Walter Ong. Updike's measured superlative was: "A prodigious piece of scholarship, indispensable in the libraries of Anglophone Christendom." Among the others, I might single out, quoting only in part, Davies: "It promises to be a wonderful book for the student and the browser and it should be of inestimable value to scholars, teachers, and writers."

This has certainly been my experience. I go to it often and rarely come away without something wonderful that I hadn't gone in looking for. I quite believe the jacket flap claim that the book was sixteen years in the making. They were years well spent. This is an *opus magnum* full of erudition, judgment, and mature humanity. □

Patricia Hampl

Patricia Hampl is the author of Virgin Time *(Farrar, Straus, and Giroux), a memoir. She is also the editor of* Burning Bright *(Ballantine), a new anthology of sacred poetry from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.*

By rights, Americans should be crazy for poetry. It's efficient, highly charged, even snappy. Contemporary poetry, especially, is chock-full of intimacies and private revelations. Sex and violence? Oh yes—especially sex.

We do occasionally give over to its powers. Maya Angelou reading her (I'm afraid—not very good) poem at President Bill Clinton's inauguration met with reverent response, was quoted at length on television and in the newspapers. But for the most part, we leave poetry to the poets. That is, we leave it alone.

Maybe one reason poetry doesn't claim a bigger place in our reading is that we have lost the habit of reading a *book* of poems. We see individual poems sprinkled in magazines like cartoons, used as graphic relief from long columns of prose. And we pass on.

Yet as I look over my year's reading, I realize that among the many prose works piled up (novels and memoirs), I'm drawn back most to the poems. Some were books I reviewed, others I read because of someone else's review, or picked up because of the cover (I choose wine by the label, too). Poetry stays on my shelves. I return to it after I've lost entirely the thread of the novel's plot that once grabbed me.

In spite of its relatively small readership, a lot of poetry gets published in America. One way to get the lay of the

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Toward a Civilization of Love

John Paul II, with a deep sense of mission and destiny, has repeatedly called on the world to build a civilization of love, a culture of life. His words offer us hope, but they also carry a profound challenge to the existing social order and to the ideological camps vying for its control. The reaction has been predictable: the "left" loudly rejects the Pope's critique of sexual individualism and his refusal to bend Catholic doctrine to the winds of modernity. The "right," while rightly affirming John Paul's defense of unborn life, quietly ignores his criticisms of economic individualism, the death penalty and ecological destruction. If you are trying to transcend the shallow dichotomies, if you are striving for a whole Catholicism, you will most likely feel marginal, perhaps even alienated.

Or you could read *Cælum et Terra*.

Cælum et Terra (Latin for "heaven and earth") is a Catholic quarterly journal, the work of people who are enthusiastic for what Chesterton called the "wild truth" of Christianity. We don't claim to be the "voice of the Pope," but in the tradition of lay reflection, we explore such topics as homeschooling, technology, sacred art, Christian environmentalism, social justice, simple living and much more. At once orthodox and radical, hopeful and critical, we are intent on the sort of whole Catholicism the Holy Father proposes. Won't you join us?

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land is to start with the annual *Best American Poetry* anthology. The 1995 edition, selected by Richard Howard (Houghton Mifflin, $13, 303 pp.), gives a good sampling of some of the notable poems published in the past year.

Then move smartly on to Mark Doty's miraculous *Atlantis* (Harper Collins, $12, 103 pp.). To say this collection is "about" AIDS and the culture of tragedy and courage that surrounds it, is only to say Mark Doty has found in the loss of his beloved Wally an emblem that springs open for us all. Like Keats, Mark Doty is poised on exact perception. When he sees the ocean—the salt spray hits you. Perhaps the book's best splendor is the seemingly casual, immediate voice which manages to engage us in a story whose end the poet refuses to see as horrific, even as he fiercely exposes its heartbreaking details.

Poets see metaphor where others see only trouble. Like Doty, Ellen Bryant Voigt has turned to a great pandemic for the subject of her majestic new book, *Kyrie* (W. W. Norton, $17.95 , 96 pp.). In her case, it is the "Spanish" flu epidemic of 1918 which killed more than 20 million people. In a series of elegantly framed fourteen-line poems, Voigt inhabits, rather than simply "tells," the story of this great, but largely neglected epilogue to the Great War. Some of the poems are in the voices of the victims, or of those left behind. Simplicity and spareness are the hallmarks of her style. In a letter-poem from the front, one soldier writes to his love:

Dear Mattie, it's you
I think of when I say my prayers,
your face,
it's you I'll want when I get back
from this
just like the night that I said Marry
me
and you said Yes, and the moon
came
from behind the cloud as I had
wished it to,
and I kissed your mouth, and then
your chestnut hair.

Edward Hirsch's *Earthly Measures* (Knopf, $20, 93 pp.) is dominated by the search for God. "What has happened to the eternal presences?" he asks in a poem that, like others in the collection, attempts to get to the bottom of the contemporary ache for an "absent" God. He wishes "to contemplate the humility of kneeling," he says in another poem. Whether he writes of the factory towns of the Midwest, the luscious Europe of the south, the pilgrimages of his various heroes—Henry James, Simone Weil, Orpheus—or about his own love, the poems are really about the mystery of the instinct to sing. For singing, the poet's task, is a gesture as unbidden as falling to one's knees.

Joyce Sutphen is a new voice, winner of the 1994 Barnard New Women Poets Prize for her first book, *Straight Out of View* (Beacon, $12.95, 106 pp.). The hard-scrabble Minnesota landscape is her setting, a terrain which, she says wryly, "is not the country for poetry." Her keen eye seems bred of a cherished, but never sentimentalized, farm girlhood.

Poetry is sometimes classed with opera as a rarefied pleasure. But that's all wrong. What these poets have in common is an immediacy of experience that is hard to find elsewhere. As William Carlos Williams, the great poet who also brooded on poetry's elusive fate in America, once wrote:

It is difficult
to get the news from poems
yet men die miserably every day
for lack
of what is found there. □

"The muse is upon me, Patricia. I'm loading the sonnet program."

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Thomas Swick

Thomas Swick is the travel editor of the Sun-Sentinel *in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the author of the travel memoir* Unquiet Days: At Home in Poland *(Ticknor & Fields).*

I may be the only contributor to this round-up who lives in a city without a bookstore. (I don't count B. Dalton and Waldenbooks up at the mall.) Which means that when Borders opens later this year, next door to the mall, I can enjoy the event without any of the nagging guilt that people elsewhere have about the threatened extinction of their beloved independents.

Luckily I travel, frequently to places with bookstores. And in the newsroom I sit next to the book editor, a location that keeps me alert to, for the most part, the large numbers of books I would never wish to read.

But there are exceptions. This spring I spotted *Edward Lear: A Biography* by Peter Levi (Scribner, $30, 331 pp.). "How pleasant to know Mr. Lear," I thought, "who has written such volumes of stuff!" It was a few days after I had booked a room at the Edward Lear Hotel in London.

Levi, who has enormous respect for Lear as a painter, also portrays him as a doughty traveler, following him around the more rugged parts of southern Italy, the Levant, and India. Lear's endurance appears even more impressive when you learn—as many of his friends never did—that throughout his life he suffered epileptic seizures. Lear's whimsical drawings—more familiar today than his paintings—decorate each chapter head, and his beguiling nonsense verse is threaded throughout. The book ends—no doubt fittingly—with what must be one of the saddest last sentences in the history of biography: "None of his English friends except Dr. Hassall and his wife could come to his funeral."

Whimsy of a more philosophical nature pervades the engaging memoir by the Polish writer Stanislaw Lem: *Highcastle: A Remembrance* (Harcourt Brace & Co., $22, 146 pp.). Known primarily for his science fiction, Lem is no less adept at recalling the past—in this case prewar Lvov—and making it sound as alien and quirky as any fantasized future. His dream-like, childhood explorations into both the material and metaphysical worlds acquaint us with a truly original mind. Yet Lem possesses the memoirist's gift of telling a selfishly personal story and giving it a universal resonance, so that the pleasure for the reader is twofold: the discovery of a previously unimaginable life and the reassurance of a human commonality.

Another book with dual rewards was *City Life: Urban Expectations in a New World*, by Witold Rybcynski (Scribner, $23, 235 pp.). A simple question from a friend who had just returned from Paris—"Why aren't our cities like that?"—inspired Rybczynski to take a look at the city throughout history. In a relatively brief space he delves far and wide, and the result is like the best textbooks you remember from college: a learned study that is a joy to read. Adding to the book's charms are the author's refreshingly unacademic sympathies. He admits that malls have killed many downtowns, but he understands that they are the physical expression of a popular yearning and, in many cases, the result of civic failure. Among their virtues, he writes, is the fact that "they are more like what public streets used to be before police indifference and overzealous protectors of individual rights effectively ensured that any behavior, no matter how antisocial, is tolerated."

I was a little disappointed with *The Pillars of Hercules: A Grand Tour of the Mediterranean*, by Paul Theroux (G. P. Putnam's Sons, $27.50, 509 pp.), partly because I have become accustomed to the more thematic, less skittering books of Jonathan Raban and Colin Thubron. Theroux, by contrast, seems like travel-lite. But he is never a dull companion—still the master of the withering phrase—and his ability to meet, and endear himself to, the most disparate characters is a gift as enviable as that of writing.

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Most of the essays in *With My Trousers Rolled*, by Joseph Epstein (W. W. Norton, $25, 317 pp.), were familiar to me from the *American Scholar*, where Epstein presides as Aristides. But they are essays of such wit and sure intelligence that they benefit from both rereading and assemblage as a whole. The subjects are hardly new—vanity, music, cats, decline—but the voice is always fresh and so engaging that it makes you want to hear it expound on an ever increasing number of topics. In a recent issue of the *Scholar*—to give you a preview perhaps of next year's favorite books—Epstein weighed in on the computer age with one of the most sensible statements I have heard on it yet:

> With the information revolution closing in, I ask myself whether it isn't possible to live deeper down, at some more genuine, less superficial level of life than that promised by an endless flow of still more and then yet again even more information. It has taken me a good while to understand this, but it turns out that the only information I am seriously interested in is that about the human heart, and this I cannot find any easy way to access....

He also, in that paragraph, does what very few writers manage to do: He holds a mirror up to your own, heretofore unarticulated feelings. □

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead is a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. She lives in Amherst, Massachusetts, writes for the Atlantic Monthly, *among other publications, and is currently working on a book about parents and children in a postmarriage society.*

As a wife and daughter, the mother of three, the sister of seven, and the aunt of twenty, I spend a lot of time hunting for birthday, wedding anniversary, and graduation cards. Not long ago, browsing in the "Relationships section" of the Hallmark Cards display, I discovered "Fear of Commitment" greeting cards. One Contemporary Card shows two snakes intimately intertwined: "I've Got You Under My Skin, Babe," the male snake says. The female snake protests: "But you shed it every three weeks." Another card earnestly confesses: "'Love' has always been a pretty scary word for me. Maybe it's because along with the word 'love' came 'commitment' and 'responsibility'...."

The word commitment used to have a hard edge. Literally, it could mean physical confinement; figuratively, it connoted a kind of voluntary self-confinement to a set of binding duties or roles. Today, in contemporary usage, it has been reduced to the sentimental vocabulary of short-term romantic and sexual relationships. The personal ad columns are filled with appeals for "committed relationships" which, in many cases, means intimate living-together relationships with no strings attached.

The mushiness of the word commitment reflects a weakening of the ideal itself. Even marriage, the classic form of commitment, has become fragile and impermanent, as the American divorce rate, the highest in the Western world, shows. And there seems to be generational momentum behind trends of weakening commitment. Younger Americans, raised in the midst of the divorce revolution, yearn for lasting marriages but are increasingly perplexed and confused about how to achieve this goal.

Perhaps because of this growing confusion and failure, many experts are now calling for schools to offer special health courses in "relationships." Relationship education might not be a bad idea, but it doesn't require a new curriculum. Stories, both old and new, provide a way of understanding what commitment means and requires. E. Annie Proulx's 1994 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *The Shipping News* (Touchstone, $12, 337 pp.) is a meditation on how fragile people construct strong bonds. Its central character, Quoyle, is a young father unmoored by grief over the accidental death of his adulterous wife and left to raise his two small daughters alone. Castoff and adrift, Quoyle is rescued by a long-forgotten aunt, who leads the family back to their ancestral home in Newfoundland. Here, in a land of slippery rocks and treacherous waters, the father, aunt, and daughters struggle to find attachment.

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The "starting over" story is the great American story, and one expects Quoyle to put down roots or sprout wings. But *The Shipping News* offers a third possibility. Its central metaphor and motif is the knot, the handmade contrivance that mediates between water and land, tying down all that would otherwise float away. One of the great delights of this book is that it is stuffed with the language and lore of knots, gleaned from a 1944 book on knots that Proulx bought for a quarter at a yard sale. We learn about ornamental knots made from hair; knots formed by human handholds; knots created from pieces of rope; knots woven into braids, leashes, restraints; knots with a hitch or a slip or a snarl. All this would be mere arcana if it did not reinforce the book's larger theme: that commitment both binds us and holds us fast. For Quoyle, a fumble-fingered man, the triumph comes in learning to fashion sound knots.

Perhaps the best stories about the nature and meaning of commitment are found in children's literature. Eric Knight's 1940 classic *Lassie Come Home* (Henry Holt and Company, $16.95) has been reissued in a new edition for younger children by Rosemary Wells, with illustrations by Susan Jeffers. Forget about the television series, where Lassie is cast as a canine EMT. The original Lassie story is about the tenacity and permanence of bonds. Lassie belongs to a poor coal mining family; when the father loses his job and can find no other way to put food on the table, he takes the desperate step of selling Lassie to a rich duke. Yet, as the family discovers, Lassie is not governed by the rules of the marketplace. Lassie is a one-family dog, stubborn in his attachments which cannot be alienated or bartered but serve only to guide him home. As another decidedly countercultural view of commitment, consider a holiday rereading of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Steadfast Tin Soldier" (*The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories*, translated by Erik Christian Haugaard, Anchor Books/Doubleday, $16.95, 1,101 pp.). Until I picked it up again recently, I had forgotten that it is all about unwavering love. □

Gilbert Meilaender

Gilbert Meilaender is the Davis Professor of Religion at Oberlin College. His book Body, Soul, and Bioethics *will be published by the University of Notre Dame Press in January 1996.*

In academic life we do not always read the books that most appeal to us; we read the books we must. The trick—not easily or always accomplished—is to make the two coincide. I have for years admired and learned from Helmut Thielicke's work in theological ethics. Written with a passion that does not obscure his considerable learning, marked by the profound crisis of the Nazi regime, his work has been paid too little heed in this country. We are fortunate now to have *Notes from a Wayfarer* (Paragon, $29.95, 422 pp.), the English translation of Thielicke's autobiography. As a young theologian, Thielicke was removed from his teaching position by the Nazis. When he turned to parish ministry and was in demand as a preacher, he was also on occasion forbidden to preach. But there were other tyrants in life as well, and years later, when he was at Hamburg University during a period of student uprising in the '60s, he was the target of radical student groups. The story of their attempt to disrupt his preaching is a stirring one, well worth reading today. Through it all he carries the theme of the wayfarer, seeing himself as a guest "on this beautiful planet," but ultimately called by the voice of the Good Shepherd to a still great fulfillment.

An even more towering figure of twentieth-century theology was Karl Barth. So rich and complicated is his thought, however, that he is read far less often than he deserves. *The Hastening that Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* (Oxford, $17.95, 208 pp.), by Nigel Biggar, was first published in 1993 and is now available in paperback. Many have doubted the possibility of constructing any ethic at all on the basis

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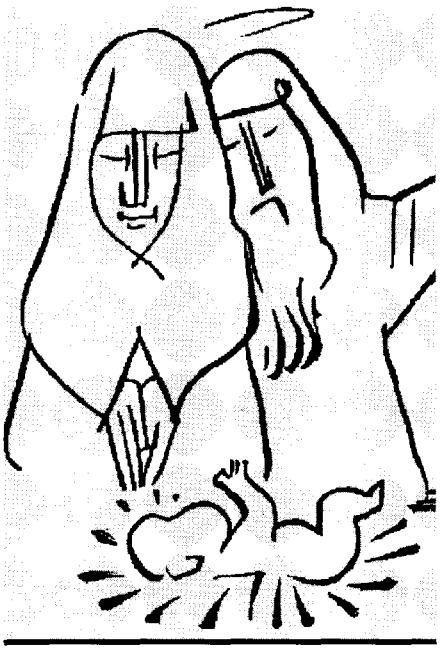
of Barth's theological premises, but Biggar's is a wonderfully concise and precise explication. He captures some of the aesthetic beauty of Barth's work while also drawing the reader into problems that are central for Christian ethics. He shows how the recently popular category of "narrative" was used by Barth—before it became fashionable—to unfold the role of Scripture in ethics. He suggests that Barth's overwhelming emphasis on the freedom of God to command in any moment does not eliminate all continuity from our understanding of what we ought to do or what sort of person we ought to be. The book is a model of clear theological prose.

The moral life also requires, of course, that we reflect on particular problems. One of the most troubling issues facing our society is given provocative and penetrating treatment by David Blankenhorn in *Fatherless America* (Basic Books, $23, 328 pp.). His starting point is very simple: If we care about what is good for children (and, hence, good for the next generation of our own society), we should recognize that one of the things they must have is a father who is a daily presence in their lives. The simple premise is developed in rich detail by Blankenhorn as he unpacks the different "cultural scripts" we provide for fathers—scripts that are often embarrassingly thin and that often seem to suggest that fathers are essentially unnecessary. He is a master of dissecting some of the shibboleths about parenthood that we take for granted—as, for example, in his discussion of the "Deadbeat Dad" or the "Visiting Father." Even the footnotes of this book are a rich store of information, and the book provides cultural criticism of a very high order.

Another hotly debated issue in our society, even though its effects are not perhaps as wide ranging, is the morality of homosexuality. The central arguments are no longer about private preference but about public affirmation and ecclesiastical blessing. Thomas Schmidt, a New Testament scholar, has written *Straight and Narrow? Compassion & Clarity in the Homosexuality Debate* (InterVarsity, $10.99, 239 pp.), which deserves a wider audience than it is likely to get. This is not a book only about biblical texts, though it is that in part. Schmidt has read very widely in the ethical, sociological, and medical aspects of this debate. He is careful, judicious, and evangelical throughout. I do not know of a better book on the subject.

If we only read new books, however, we miss the pleasure—and insight—that comes from returning time and again to books that are rich in wisdom. And since these are reflections written to be read in the Christmas season, it is worth noting that Ignatius Press has again made available Dorothy Sayers's



The Man Born to Be King ($14.95, 338 pp.). This cycle of plays on the life of Christ, first written for radio broadcast, is a gem well worth reading at least once a year during Advent or Lent. In Sayers's powerful artistic imagination the stories of the Gospels come alive and are given a coherence that is both striking and persuasive. Moreover, her long introduction to the play cycle is learned, witty, and provocative. Those who have not read the plays will, I think, find it a moving experience. Those who return to read them again will be drawn still more deeply into the most remarkable story imaginable—a story in which, as Sayers put it in one of her essays, "the dogma is the drama." □

Anita M. Pampusch

Anita M. Pampusch is president of the College of Saint Catherine in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

My bookshelf contains an eclectic assortment of volumes: philosophical classics, history, biography, travel, novels, mystery stories for light reading, and a set of contemporary feminist books in philosophy and theology which I read as part of a book club. I have selected three volumes which I liked best. Their styles and topics are widely different, yet each book (one by a Chinese woman, two by Americans) is a commentary on women's experience and suggests that reflection upon that experience can illuminate our understandings of the inner life, prayer, and ultimately, God.

Perhaps the most fascinating was *Wild Swans* by June Chang (Doubleday, Anchor Books, $14, 524 pp.). Chang, whose given name, Er Hong, means "second wild swan" (her mother was the first), recounts her own story in the context of her family, notably her mother and grandmother, whose combined experiences spanned most of twentieth-century China. The country moved from the Manchu Empire during her grandmother's childhood, through the Japanese occupation during World War II and the civil war between the Kuomingtang and the Communists which marked her mother's developing years, to the author's own experiences during the regime of Mao Zedong. The book ends, in fact, shortly after Mao's death when Chang receives a scholarship for study in England.

The book is gripping, not only because it provides an insider's commentary on the cataclysmic events of twentieth-century China, but especially because it reveals the souls of three strong Chinese women who dealt personally with uncertainty, physical pain, and deprivation. Each was a survivor in her own way. I found myself wondering about the inner life that sustained these women. It was

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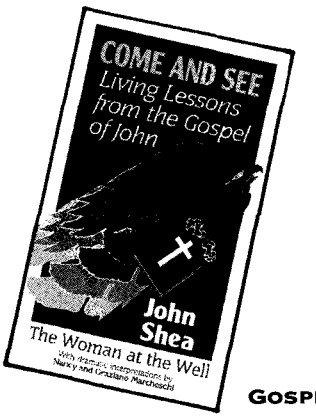

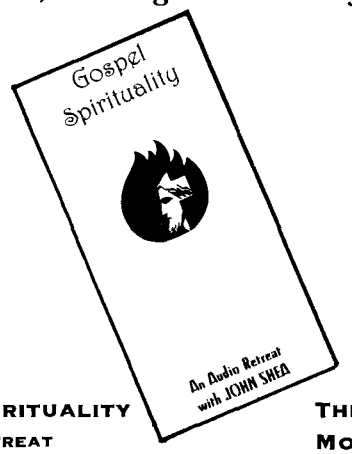

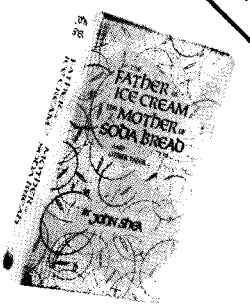

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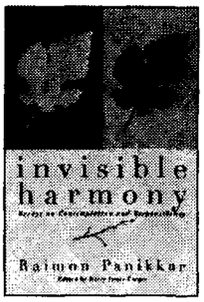

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surely not based on religion (at least for Chang and her mother, devoted Communists). It seemed to be born of a fierce commitment to family, a strong sense of survival, and an appreciation for things of the spirit: books, art, music, ideas. The traditional culture and the family culture shaped them as much as the commitment to communism so firmly embraced by June and her mother. They showed themselves to be idealistic, creative, tough, and courageous over and over again. As her grandmother remarked after her mother once defied soldiers threatening her, "You have your grandfather's blood in your veins."

Er Hong recounts a personal quest to define her own ideas and place in the world even while both were dictated to her. Her gradual awareness that things were not as she had been told, and her willingness to let that awareness develop even when her thoughts had to be hidden, eventually led her out of China. Having made the decision to stay in the West, she wrote the book after a visit from her mother who revealed much more of the family's stories.

A seemingly very different journey, more consciously introspective and personal, yet, curiously, one that also helps her to understand her place in the world, is described by Patricia Hampl in *Virgin Time* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, $22, 242 pp.). Having rejected her "dead" Catholic past, Hampl was unable to shake the memory of a "mystical" childhood experience. She searches for the meaning of that experience in prayer, through spiritual direction, through visits to holy European places (in the company of believers and tourists), and finally through entry into the routine and community of a Cistercian monastery in California. There, she experiences a deep silence which envelops her and makes her aware of who she is and what her special "vocation" is. It is there that she begins to understand prayer, her own prayer, in her own "virgin time" (a phrase taken from Thomas Merton who describes *temps vierge* as "the point between darkness and light, ...full of potential"). *Virgin Time* is beautifully written, full of sometimes humorous but always recognizable descriptions of a Midwestern Catholic upbringing, and with such astute observations of the human scene that one might enjoy it just for that. Some readers might be caught off guard by the depth and significance of the concluding chapter. It is wonderful reading.

Hampl quotes her spiritual director as speaking about the paths on which image and metaphor take us. "It's when the church tries to tame the metaphors that you get into trouble," she says. That leads me to my third selection, probably the most beautiful book I've encountered in contemporary theology, one which deals with images and metaphors for God. *She Who Is* by Elizabeth Johnson (Crossroad, $24.95, 316 pp.) astonishes, too, for its brilliance and depth of research. Johnson uses her study of images, metaphor, and analogy in the naming of God to support the underlying thesis that using women's reality to illuminate understandings of the ineffable God can also serve to emancipate women. She argues persuasively that if the symbol gives rise to the thought, then while our experience can provide valuable images and metaphors for God (for example, as originator and sustainer, compassionate lover, etc.), reflection on these symbols can also serve to ennoble and free us. After several possible names for God are examined, she ultimately selects "She Who Is," a divine title signifying the creative, relational power of a being who evolves, suffers with, sustains, and enfolds the universe. Johnson goes on to establish that such a name is linguistically possible, theologically legitimate, and existentially and religiously necessary.

She Who Is is an intellectual rather than a personal journey. The task is universal, not individual, and the insights provide legitimacy and dignity to all women while they illuminate for all Catholic Christians the rich traditions around our understandings of God. □

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Paul Baumann

Paul Baumann is the associate editor of Commonweal.

Now this is fun! It's not every day, or every Christmas, that one gets to share space with two of the authors one is about to recommend. Jack Miles and Gilbert Meilaender demonstrate their erudition above, and it is a great pleasure to champion their recent work here.

God: A Biography (Knopf, $27.50, 424 pp.), Miles's beautifully written, learned, and mischievous "literary" reading of the Hebrew Scriptures, does what most books of theology or scriptural exegesis sadly fail to do: it brings the protagonist of the Bible to life, his bloody sword, unfathomable motives, unrequited longing, and scandalous masculinity intact. Miles's bold revisionist reading of Job, in which God himself is silenced by Job's ironic challenge, is one example of how disorienting this "biography" can be. Similarly, the discussion of God's sexual jealousy and "characterological" masculinity is refreshingly free of either nervous apology or any reactionary agenda. But more important than any one example of interpretive daring, is how the grandeur of God is enhanced, not diminished, by the travails of self-discovery and the startling lack of omnipotence that Miles finds everywhere in the text.

Luke Timothy Johnson (*Commonweal*, May 19, 1995) found much that was dubious in Miles's attempt to read the Bible strictly on its own terms as a kind of novel. Johnson's reservations are well-taken. Our ability to think about the God of the Bible as a coherent character is largely the product of our extrabiblical theological understanding, not something that emerges unabetted from the often bewildering complexity of the biblical texts. Even while feigning detachment, Miles relies on that 5,000-year-old theological tradition in creating his "character." Still, despite its heterodox conclusions, *God: A Biography* leaves the reader with a powerful sense of the biblical God as a real presence, not merely a doctrinal formula or a philosophical conundrum.

Compared to Job or 2 Samuel, reading ethics is like rooting for the Red Sox; one is continually let down in the end. But there are exceptions. Meilaender, an ethicist graced with a lucid prose style and a literary sensibility, is such an exception. In *Faith and Faithfulness: Basic Themes in Christian Ethics* (University of Notre Dame Press, $11.95, 211 pp.), he is out to make sense of Christian freedom, human nature, and even the limits of the Christian vision. Shakespeare, Karl Barth, Helmut Thielicke, Augustine, and the philosopher Michael Oakeshott figure prominently. Meilaender's careful critique of universal moral absolutes is very helpful, especially his ability to make room for ambiguity and exceptional cases—indeed, for both human and divine freedom—without relativizing fundamental values. He is especially good on the tension between particular loyalties to family and friends

Heart Talks with Mother God

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Heart Talks with Mother God is an extraordinary book for parents, teachers, and caregivers who want to help young children experience another metaphor for God. Its stories, songs, pictures, prayers, and activities introduce children to the nurturing, tender care of Mother God, who loves them unconditionally. It tells girls "yes, I am created in God's image," and it introduces both girls and boys to the feminine face of God found in Scripture.

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and broader humanitarian responsibilities. The legitimate autonomy of the secular sphere is also shrewdly assessed. In this context, Meilaender relies on an essay by the Thomist Josef Pieper (which appeared in *Commonweal*!). Pieper described the legacy of the Christian West as "theologically grounded worldliness." Meilander explains: "Worldliness—that is, an appreciation of natural reality and a recognition that its existence cannot simply be absorbed by Christian vision." Later, relying on Augustine, Meilaender elaborates: "For we need more than a way to carve out a distinctively Christian life amidst the ruins of a surrounding civilization; we need also some way to maintain contact with all that is good in that civilization, to understand that if it is often vicious (in the technical, moral sense), its vice is, at least sometimes, 'splendid.'"

On a lighter, airier, and entertaining note, David Lodge's most recent novel, *Therapy* (Viking, $22.95, 321 pp.), is a delight from its hobbled protagonist's entrance to the winning, if perhaps too winning, conclusion. Tubby Passmore, a successful TV sitcom writer and hypochondriac, is at the very full heart of *Therapy*, fitfully navigating both the perils of a suddenly collapsing marriage and his long-collapsing, fifty-something body. Lodge's novels have chronicled an entire generation of English and mostly Catholic academics, and he can make you laugh out loud. He can also quote and explain Kierkegaard—and make you laugh out loud doing it. Not many novelists capture the everyday humanity of their characters with as much affection or sympathy as Lodge does in *Therapy*.

John Updike's *The Afterlife and Other Stories* (Fawcett, $6.99, 316 pp.), shows his powers of observation and incantation are undiminished. Does anyone else suffuse the conflicts and minutiae of middle-class American life and longing with such transcendent ambition? Only Updike can turn the possible sexual subtext of a dental hygienist's touch into an erotic poem so gently transgressive that the reader's jaw aches from smiling.

If your taste runs to politics and polemics, Andrew Sullivan's *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (Knopf, $23, 222 pp.) is required reading. Sullivan, the editor of the *New Republic*, is gay, Catholic, more conservative than liberal in his theology, and more classically liberal than progressive in his politics. In fact, he's a bit of a Tory. Sullivan advocates a strict state neutrality concerning the legal status of homosexuality. That means no antidiscrimination laws protecting homosexuals, no barriers to service in the military, and no marriage laws discriminating against same-sex couples. This is a book that can change minds, and is especially noteworthy for the graciousness with which Sullivan engages others. Whether the liberal state can ever be, or should be, as neutral as Sullivan suggests remains the question. For Catholics with a soft spot for natural-law arguments about sexuality (never my favorites), Sullivan's exegegis of the church's muddled homosexual anthropology is telling. What, he asks, are homosexuals for, if, as the church now accepts, homosexuality is a given, not a choice? Can such a "natural" condition logically require a lifetime of sexual and emotional denial?

Finally, *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory* (Routledge, $17.95, 323 pp.), anthropologist Mary Douglas's most recent essays, has been issued in paperback. This is a sometimes difficult, but always rewarding collection covering topics as diverse as witchcraft, the usefulness of stigma, the misguided search for the historical Jesus, and the contrasting cultures and consequent effectiveness of Swedish and English trade unions. *Commonweal* readers will find one essay especially illuminating. "The Debate on Women Priests" is the best discussion of what is at stake for the church in the ordination question. Douglas takes the arguments of both the Vatican and reformers seriously, explains why the two talk past one another, and hints at a possible compromise solution. Her suggestion, which she has recently fleshed out elsewhere, is that the church create a commission of women somewhat parallel in status and authority to the college of cardinals.

Admittedly, this will not satisfy either side, but it just might salvage the legitimate vision of both. Douglas argues that the gender-based sacramental imagery the Vatican defends in the exclusiveness of the male priesthood is valuable, and that change should incorporate that imagery, not eviscerate it. She is equally convinced that the church will continue to lose credibility, especially in the first world, if it does nothing more than issue ultimatums about the unchangeable nature of the priesthood. Catholicism should make institutional changes that give concrete expression to the church's already very positive symbolic vocabulary regarding women.

For my money, Douglas's sure grasp of how symbolism is tied to social relations is indispensable in making sense of contemporary religious conflict. □

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ALONE WITH GOD, AND EVERYBODY

Lawrence S. Cunningham

At the Trappist monastery of Gethsemani where I visit, the office of vigils begins at 3:15 in the morning. The cantor intones the ancient psalm, "O God, come to my assistance," and the community responds with the line, "O Lord, make haste help to me!" That tag of a psalm opens each monastic office as it has for 1,500 years since Cassian, one of the great monastic pioneers, described it as the perfect prayer of the monk.

For forty-odd minutes the community sings psalms interspersed with readings from Scripture and other writings. I glance at the rows of white-cowled monks, spying old friends: a brother who has stood in this choir since 1940 (he entered the monastery at the age of fifteen); the organist who is a brilliant scholar and well-known musicologist; former novices of Thomas Merton, including the abbot, who have survived the postconciliar exodus from religious life; and the young novices who still cannot suppress a yawn despite the fact that the night is the time of the monk. A monk, like any sane person, knows that getting up in the middle of the night is an act contrary to natural inclinations. When the fourth-century *Abba* Poeman was asked if monks who doze during the liturgy should be aroused, he edified his hearers by saying that when he saw a brother dozing, he let him nap on his lap.

For me, the best time of the monastic day comes in the long interval of two hours between the end of vigils and the morning office of lauds when the monks regather to greet the coming of the dawn. In that long space everyone is free to spend the time in silent prayer or in reading or simple quiet. I usually get a quick cup of coffee (the brother who is the monastery's gardener puts on a fresh cup for the visitors in the guest wing each morning) and go outside to sit in the velvety dark of the Kentucky night. Only the odd passing car on the country road at the edge of the monastery breaks the night sounds of the frogs, cicadas, and, far off among the knobs that dot this rural area, punctuated barks of restless dogs. This dark time is for vigilance:

"O Watchman, what of the night?"

Who else is up at this hour, Lord?

I think of those who lie awake staring at the ceiling, worrying about money or children or the nagging pain in the belly that keeps them from sleep.

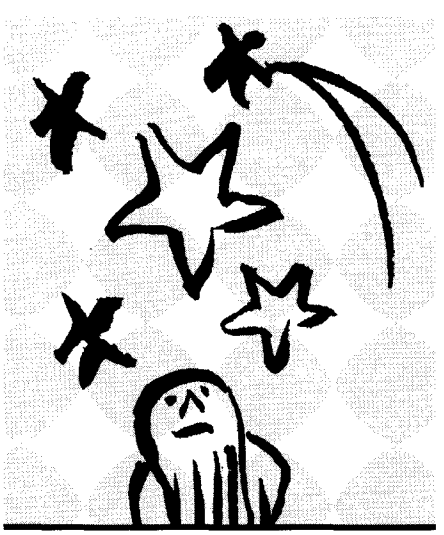
I think of those who work in all-night diners or convenience stores, looking forever like people out of a painting by Edward Hopper. Are they there because they love the night or because they need the money?

Have the bars closed and their disgorged denizens made it safely home?

Have the street hustlers and the young-but-so-old hookers quit the streets yet?

Have the dopers found some rest? Are the street people now snoring in wine-drenched quiet?

Is it easy for the cops in their patrol cars and the firemen in their stations and the nurses in the ER room? Have the sirens silenced a bit?



Do the people on death row sleep easily amid the coughs and groans of the prison population?

Have the deserted mom, the battered child, the lonely old woman finished their tears for the night?

Who at this hour are sitting at kitchen tables, the smoke wreathing their heads and the coffee untasted as they worry about the coming of the day?

Is it now too late for the rapist and the housebreaker? Is the night just picking up for them on the West Coast?

Do the monitors continue their blip in the intensive care wards or has, at this moment, a flatline appeared?

Who has just driven by in the pickup truck and to what destination?

Do the homeless stir a bit looking for comfort in their doorways and cardboard boxes?

Are the milkers and produce buyers and long-haul truckers at work?

Are my kids and wife and friends and students safe?

These are the scenes which click by on the mental screen of my mind as I watch for the first crack of the dawn which will not come until we are about ready to go back to church for morning praise.

Are these scenes some form of prayer? They do not have the texture of prayer language and I would feel too self-consciously hypocritical to say, "Lord, protect them," even if I were saying it to myself. That kind of language sort of sticks in my throat right now.

A few yards up the hill, Thomas Merton lies in the cemetery under a plain white cross. In this place he once wrote, "The more we are alone with God, the more we are with one another in darkness...."

The bell rings for lauds and my vigil is over. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology at the University of Notre Dame.*

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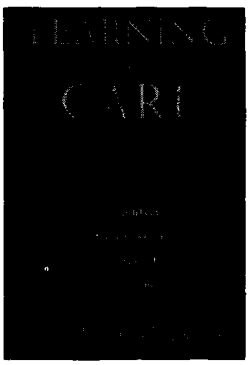

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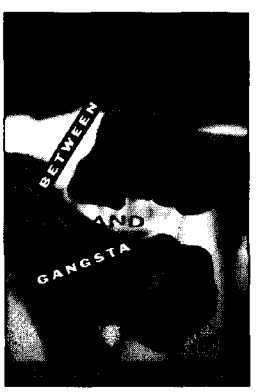

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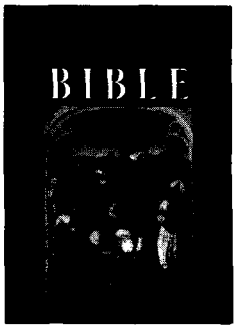

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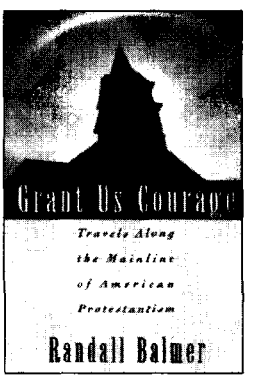

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